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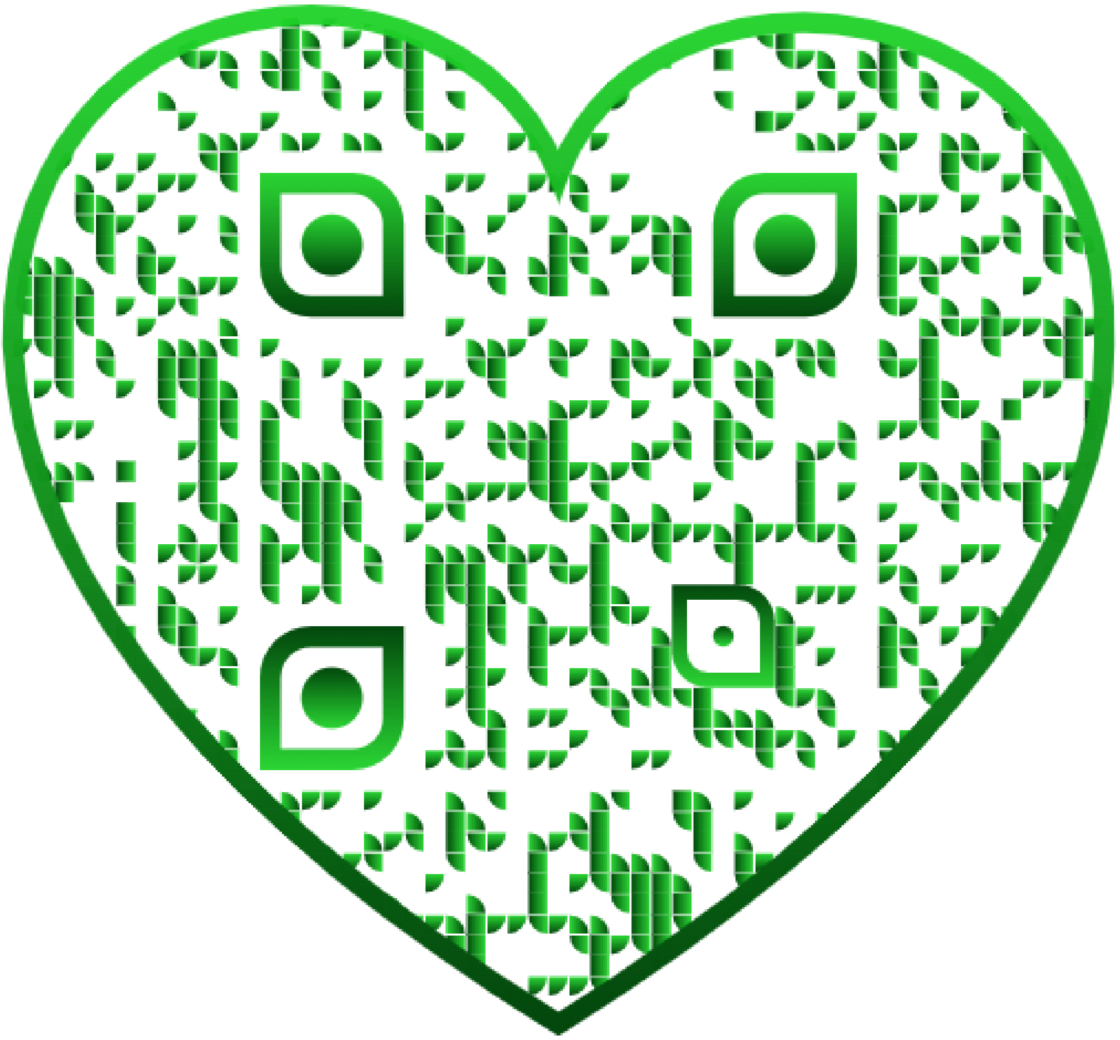
LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC
+
40 UNDER 40
—
21 UNDER 21
XOXO,
CAMILA
WITH A NEW LOOK, ALBUM AND "BIG BADDIE ENERGY," CAMILA CABELLO REINVENTS HERSELF



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CAN COCA-COLA CRACK THE CHARTS?

AS PEPSI HAS PULLED BACK, ITS RIVAL IS MUSCLING FURTHER INTO MUSIC — HERE'S WHY STARS ARE SIGNING ON

CONGRATULATIONS
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WOMAN OF THE YEAR
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KAROL G FOR BEING HONORED AS
WOMAN OF THE YEAR
AT BILLBOARD'S LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC SPECIAL

Bichota RECORDS

A MUSICAL POSTCARD *From* MOTHER NATURE

Located in Ridgedale, Missouri, just a few miles from Branson, Thunder Ridge Nature Arena combines the natural beauty of the Ozarks with the stunningly beautiful architecture that seamlessly integrates into the surrounding environment. With a capacity of 20,000, this beautiful venue provides views into the world around it with every seat holding breathtaking views of 1,200 acres of Table Rock Lake, inlets, and infinite verdant forested Boston Mountain vistas. This destination also features luxurious amenities including “The Veterans Tower,” a never-before-seen luxury box experience, rising 12-stories with VIP suites and unobstructed views of the stage and panoramic nature sightlines.

It is described by its creator and visionary — noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris as a “gift of the Ozarks to the world.”
It is the only venue on earth completely dedicated to conservation with all net proceeds from events going towards supporting conservation.

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Johnny Morris Bass Pro Shops

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MAY 25
MORGAN WALLEN

JUNE 13
CHRIS STAPLETON

JULY 27
LUKE BRYAN

JUST ANNOUNCED!
JULY 21
THE ROLLING STONES

AUG. 31
SLIGHTLY STOOPID

SEPT. 8
IMAGINE DRAGONS

SEPT. 21
PITBULL

OCT. 8
FUERZA REGIDA

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ND
A
WITH LOVE,
habibi
MANAGEMENT
RIMAS

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JUNE 1, 2024
VOLUME 136
NO. 8

ON THE COVER
Camila Cabello photographed by Erica Hernández on April 30 in Los Angeles.

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Billboard will publish its next issue on June 8. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

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2024 40 Under 40 honorees

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40 under 40

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BILLBOARD LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC
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LIVE NATION
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Espíritu de Cambio

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Our 40 Under 40 honorees - Miles Gersh, David Goldsen and Joseph Khoury - have chosen to spotlight Headcount for their commitment to inform and empower music fans to vote.

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 6.01.2024

Hit Me Hard And Soft Lands A Strike Atop Rock, Alternative Charts

TOP ROCK & ALTERNATIVE ALBUMS		
1		
Hit Me Hard and Soft Billie Eilish		
LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
-	1	1

BILLIE EILISH'S LATEST studio set, *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, launches at No. 1 on both the Top Rock & Alternative Albums and Top Alternative Albums charts (dated June 1).

The release starts with 339,000 equivalent album units — a new weekly high for the singer-songwriter — earned in the United States in the week ending May 23, according to Luminate.

Eilish also logs her best week in traditional album sales (191,000) and vinyl album sales (90,000) with the project, which concurrently begins at No. 1 on the Vinyl Albums and Indie Store Album Sales charts.

Hit Me Hard and Soft's first-week sales were supported by its availability across nine vinyl variants, four CD editions, a cassette tape, a standard digital download album and three deluxe download versions.

Eilish announced the set on April 8. While it was not preceded by any music, she teased snippets in press appearances leading up to its arrival on May 17. That day, she also premiered the official video for the album's "Lunch," which debuts at No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100. The song opens with 32.8 million official streams, 20.2 million in radio reach and 3,000 sold.

The 22-year-old earns her sixth Hot 100 top 10 and highest debut. She previously began in the tier with "My Future" (No. 6, August 2020) and "bad guy" (No. 7, April 2019). Meanwhile, all 10 songs on *Hit Me Hard and Soft* enter the top 40; prior to the album, Eilish had charted 10 such hits, from "Bury a Friend" (No. 14 peak, February 2019) through "What Was I Made For?" (No. 14, August 2023).

—KEITH CAULFIELD AND GARY TRUST

PETROS STUDIO

charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 6.01.2024

Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title / PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist / IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
-	1	1	#1 for 2 WEEKS AIR **I Had Some Help** L.BELL,CHARLIE HANDSOME,HOSKINS (A.R.POST,M.C.WALLEN,L.B.BELL,CHARLIE HANDSOME,E.K.SMITH, J.J.HOSKINS,C.P.WALTERS,A.G.GORLEY)	**Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	1	2
1	2	2	**Not Like Us** MUSTARD (K.L.DUCKWORTH)	**Kendrick Lamar** PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	3
2	3	3	**Million Dollar Baby** M.VOSSBERG,J.ROY,MANNYVELLI,SPARKHEEM,KAVI (T.RICHMAN)	**Tommy Richman** ISO SUPREMACY/PULSE RECORDS	2	4
5	4	4	**A Bar Song (Tipsy)** S.COOK,N.SASTRY (C.O.CHIBUEZE,S.C.COOK,N.SASTRY,J.JONES,J.A.KENT,M.A.WILLIAMS)	**Shaboozey** AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE/MAGNOLIA MUSIC	3	6
HOT SHOT DEBUT		5	**Lunch** FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL)	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	5	1
8	9	6	**Espresso** J.BUNETTA (S.CARPENTER,J.C.BUNETTA,A.R.ALLEN,S.N.JONES)	**Sabrina Carpenter** ISLAND/REPUBLIC	4	6
10	6	7	**Lose Control** INFAMOUS,AMMO,J.BUNETTA (J.E.COLEMAN,J.C.BUNETTA,M.RODRIGUEZ-DIAZ,MIKKY EKKO,J.C.DIMSDALE)	**Teddy Swims** SWIMS INT./WARNER	1	41
9	5	8	**Beautiful Things** E.BLAIR (B.BOONE,E.BLAIR,J.L.LARSEN)	**Benson Boone** NIGHT STREET/WARNER	2	18
11	10	9	**Too Sweet** BEKON,PETE G,CHAKRA,A.HOZIER-BYRNE (A.HOZIER-BYRNE,D.TANNENBAUM,P.GONZALES, D.N.KRIEGER,S.A.GHEMAN,S.D.JOHNSON,T.R.MEHLENBACHER)	**Hozier** RUBYWORKS/COLUMBIA	1	9
4	8	10	SAL **Fortnight** J.M.ANTONOFF,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,J.M.ANTONOFF,A.R.POST)	**Taylor Swift Featuring Post Malone** REPUBLIC	1	5
6	7	11	**Like That** METRO BOOMIN (N.D.WILBURN,L.T.WAYNE,K.L.DUCKWORTH,R.OLIVER,J.COOLEY,K.HOOD,A.TILMON JR.)	**Future, Metro Boomin & Kendrick Lamar** BOOMINATI/FREEBANDZ/REPUBLIC/EPIC	1	9
NEW		12	**Chihiro** FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL)	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	12	1
NEW		13	**Birds Of A Feather** FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL)	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	13	1
13	12	14	**Saturn** C.LANG,R.BISEL,SOLOMONOPHONIC,MONSUNE (S.I.ROWE,C.LANG,R.BISEL,J.SOLOMON,S.ZHANG)	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	6	13
14	13	15	**We Can't Be Friends (Wait For Your Love)** A.GRANDE,MAX MARTIN,ILYA (A.GRANDE,MAX MARTIN,I.SALMANZADEH)	**Ariana Grande** REPUBLIC	1	11
3	11	16	**Euphoria** SOUNWAVE,CARDO ON THE BEAT,KYRO,JOHNNY JULIANO,YUNG EXCLUSIVE (K.L.DUCKWORTH)	**Kendrick Lamar** PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	3	4
NEW		17	**Wildflower** FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL)	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	17	1
NEW		18	**Skinny** FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL)	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	18	1
20	18	19	**I Remember Everything** Z.L.BRYAN (Z.L.BRYAN,K.MUSGRAVES)	**Zach Bryan Featuring Kacey Musgraves** INTERSCOPE/BELTING BRONCO/WARNER/MCA NASHVILLE/WAR	1	39
19	15	20	**Stick Season** G.SIMON,N.KAHAN (N.KAHAN)	**Noah Kahan** MERCURY/REPUBLIC	9	34

Go to the Chart Beat section of billboard.com for complete charts coverage.

The 25-year-old Luton, England, native has also reached No. 7 on Emerging Artists, fueled by his first Hot 100 entry.

MARK HILTON

HOT 100

79

"Stargazing"
Myles Smith

How was "Stargazing" created?
I was in Malibu [Calif.], my first time ever there. I was with writer Jesse Fink and producer-writer Peter Fenn. I was like, "I want to write something that's really warm, fun and happy." I came up with the hook pretty instantaneously. It came from the idea of the people that you love, the things that you love, always being present in your life, maybe in a way you don't [instantly] recognize — and then that coming into light later in the day. The song wasn't finished on that day, but the embers of it were. From the moment that melody was found, the feeling in the room was infectious. As the song was gaining momentum [online], I was like, "Oh, snap. I'm going to have to finish this thing."

When you teased the song on TikTok in April, was it a finished product?
The whole song wasn't done, but it was something that we knew was special. I just fell in love with the bare bones of the song. I've got this really itchy finger — I can't wait to put something out. I know for a lot of artists it's about putting out what's perfect, but for me, there's so much beauty in imperfection. A big part of why I love the audience that I have is that they bear with me as I explore and discover what something should sound like. Them being part of my creative process is integral to the music being what it is.

What is your current relationship with social media overall?
My relationship is healthier than what it was. We naturally compare ourselves and look at people doing amazing things. For a long time, I took that as a reflection of what I wasn't doing. But I started to use social media like, "I want to use this as a tool to find my community." It became an incredible part of my artist journey. Now I have a community that thinks and expresses themselves in similar ways and teaches me things about myself and the world that I didn't know. I see it as an opportunity to connect with people across the world. —DANIELLE PASCUAL

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
Luis R Conriquez & Neton Vega	"Si No Quieres No"	86	May 18
Myles Smith	"Stargazing"	77	May 25
Koe Wetzel	"Sweet Dreams"	47	June 1
Shoreline Mafia Presents OhGeesy & Fenix Flexin	"Heat Stick"	98	June 1

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

UnitedMasters CONGRATULATES
FLOYYMENOR
billboard
21 UNDER 21
2024
#1 billboard HOT LATIN SONGS
THE FIRST CHILEAN SONG IN THE
TOP 10 OF billboard LATIN IN 25 YEARS
#3 billboard GLOBAL 200 SONGS
TOP 30 billboard HOT 100
#1 GLOBAL SHAZAM
#3 Spotify GLOBAL SONG
#4 Music GLOBAL SONG
#1 YouTube GLOBAL SONG
UnitedMasters

BILLBOARD 200

56

New Kids on the Block
Still Kids

The group's 12th charting set also enters at No. 4 on Top Album Sales with 14,000 copies sold in the United States in the week ending May 23, according to Luminate.

75

Melanie Martinez
Cry Baby

Sales generated by a new deluxe CD package helps the 2015 release reach its highest rank since 2017. The set earned 13,000 equivalent album units in the tracking week (up 35%).

98

Slash
Orgy of the Damned

Slash's latest is an all-star blues-covers project, with guest acts including Gary Clark Jr. and Chris Stapleton. It debuts at No. 1 on Blues Albums.

1

Taylor Swift
The Tortured Poets Department

Taylor Swift's *The Tortured Poets Department* scores a fifth straight and total week at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 as the title earned 378,000 equivalent album units in the United States in the week ending May 23 (up 45%), according to Luminate. The set posted its first weekly unit gain following the release of six new digital album download variants and a new CD variant, along with a stock replenishment of its previously available four deluxe CD editions and its signed CD version — all of which were sold exclusively in Swift's webstore.

Meanwhile, Billie Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* starts at No. 2 with a career-high 339,000 units. The top two both exceed 300,000 units for the first time since May 21, 2016, when Drake's *Views* debuted at No. 1 with 1.04 million units, while Beyoncé's *Lemonade* fell 1-2 in its second week with 321,000. —KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist / IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	1	#1 for 5 WEEKS GG **Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	The Tortured Poets Department	1	5
HOT SHOT DEBUT		2	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	Hit Me Hard And Soft	2	1
3	3	3	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	One Thing At A Time	1	64
-	2	4	**Gunna** GUNNA/YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/3EE	One Of Wun	2	2
4	4	5	**Future & Metro Boomin** BOOMINATI/FREEBANDZ/REPUBLIC/EPIC	We Don't Trust You	1	9
7	5	6	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	176
9	6	7	**Noah Kahan** MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Stick Season	2	78
12	8	8	**Zach Bryan** BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	Zach Bryan	1	39
10	7	9	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	SOS	1	76
11	9	10	**Benson Boone** NIGHT STREET/WARNER	Fireworks & Rollerblades	6	7
16	11	11	**Zach Bryan** BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	American Heartbreak	5	105
15	12	12	**Post Malone** MERCURY/REPUBLIC	The Diamond Collection	12	27
8	10	13	**Beyonce** PARKWOOD/COLUMBIA	Cowboy Carter	1	8
19	13	14	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	Lover	1	248
NEW		15	**Zayn** DROP ZED/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Room Under The Stairs	15	1
13	14	16	**Ariana Grande** REPUBLIC	Eternal Sunshine	1	11
17	16	17	**Olivia Rodrigo** GEFFEN/ICLG	Guts	1	37
NEW		18	**A Boogie Wit da Hoodie** HIGHBRIDGE THE LABEL/ATLANTIC/AG	Better Off Alone	18	1
21	17	19	**Teddy Swims** SWIMS INT./WARNER	I've Tried Everything But Therapy (Part I)	17	33
24	18	20	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	1989 (Taylor's Version)	1	30

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

#1 RAP TOUR #9 TOP GROSSING TOUR #9 TOP TOUR BY ATTENDANCE
CONGRATULATIONS
TRAVIS SCOTT
LIVE NATION

ALF BORDALLO

Global 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
2	2	1	#1 for 1 WEEK Million Dollar Baby	Tommy Richman	1	4
-	1	2	I Had Some Help	Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen	1	2
1	3	3	Not Like Us	Kendrick Lamar	1	3
HOT SHOT DEBUT		4	Lunch	Billie Eilish	4	1
3	4	5	Espresso	Sabrina Carpenter	2	6
NEW		6	Chihiro	Billie Eilish	6	1
5	5	7	A Bar Song (Tipsy)	Shaboozey	5	6
NEW		8	Birds Of A Feather	Billie Eilish	8	1
7	6	9	Beautiful Things	Benson Boone	1	18
9	8	10	Too Sweet	Hozier	1	9
6	7	11	Fortnight	Taylor Swift Featuring Post Malone	1	5
10	10	12	Gata Only	FloyyMenor X Cris Mj	4	15
8	9	13	I Like The Way You Kiss Me	Artemas	2	9
13	11	14	Lose Control	Teddy Swims	4	36
NEW		15	Wildflower	Billie Eilish	15	1
NEW		16	Skinny	Billie Eilish	16	1
NEW		17	L'amour De Ma Vie	Billie Eilish	17	1
NEW		18	Blue	Billie Eilish	18	1
-	50	19	GG Supernova	aespa	19	2
NEW		20	The Greatest	Billie Eilish	20	1

GLOBAL 200

1

"Million Dollar Baby"
Tommy Richman

TOMMY RICHMAN'S breakthrough hit, "Million Dollar Baby," ascends to No. 1 on the Billboard Global 200. The song drew 109 million official streams and sold 8,000 worldwide May 17-23, according to Luminate.

The Woodbridge, Va., native rules the ranking with his first song as a lead artist to enter any *Billboard* chart. It's just the third such No. 1 — and first such R&B/hip-hop hit — among 61 total leaders since the list began in September 2020, joining GAYLE's "abcdefu" (four weeks at No. 1 in January/February 2022) and Jawsh 685's "Savage Love (Laxed – Siren Beat)" with Jason Derulo and BTS (one week, October 2020).

Three Billie Eilish songs debut in the Global 200's top 10, all from her new album, *Hit Me Hard and Soft*. "Lunch" enters at No. 4, led by 95.3 million first-week worldwide streams, and is joined in the bracket by "Chihiro" at No. 6 (77.1 million) and "Birds of a Feather" at No. 8 (64 million). On the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart, the songs start at Nos. 2, 4 and 9, respectively.

Sabrina Carpenter's "Espresso" adds a third week at No. 1 on the Global Excl. U.S. chart with 63.9 million streams (up 7%) and 3,000 sold (up 20%) outside the United States May 17-23.

Plus, aespa achieves its first Global Excl. U.S. top 10 as "Supernova" shoots 23-7, up 73% to 45.4 million streams outside the United States. The South Korean quartet — featuring members Giselle, Karina, Ningning and Winter — tallied five prior top 40 hits on the chart: "Drama" (No. 21 peak, November), "Spicy" (No. 40, June 2023), "Girls" (No. 25, July 2022), "Savage" (No. 24, October 2021) and "Next Level" (No. 34, June 2021). —**GARY TRUST**

STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL-ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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DIRECTOR OF TOURING
AEG PRESENTS

NICHOLAS AYOUB

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING
MESSINA TOURING GROUP

AEG PRESENTS

ARTIST 100

6

POST MALONE

WEEKS ON CHART

413

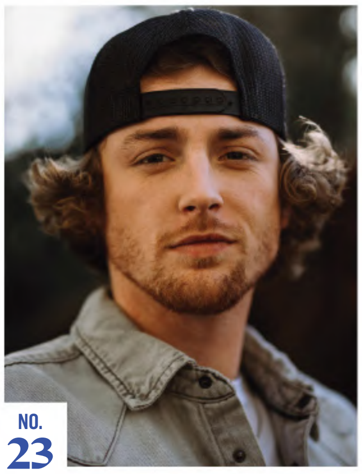
Post Malone's "I Had Some Help" (featuring Morgan Wallen) spends a second week atop the Billboard Hot 100 following its debut at No. 1 on the chart dated May 25. It drew 55 million official streams and 42.2 million radio airplay audience impressions and sold 21,000 in the United States May 17-23, according to Luminate. —GARY TRUST

NO. 20

'Stairs' Steps In

Zayn (above) returns with his first album in over three years and a shift in sonics as his fourth album, *Room Under the Stairs*, debuts at No. 3 on Top Album Sales, No. 4 on Top Rock Albums and No. 5 on both Top Rock & Alternative Albums and Americana/Folk Albums. The set was largely produced by Dave Cobb, who has previously helmed albums by artists including Brandi Carlile, Jason Isbell and Chris Stapleton. The new project is Zayn's first release on Mercury/Republic, after his first three albums arrived on RCA.

—KEITH CAULFIELD



NO. 23

Zimmerman's 'Ends' Continues Big Beginning

Bailey Zimmerman notches his fourth consecutive Country Airplay No. 1 to open his career with "Where It Ends." The song follows "Religiously," which ruled the chart for a week in September; "Rock and a Hard Place," which dominated for six weeks beginning in April 2023; and his rookie single, "Fall in Love," which reigned for a week in December 2022. "Some days it feels like I still have no idea what I'm doing, but the dreams just keep coming true," he says. "Four No. 1s... Let's keep it going. Chase your dreams."

—JIM ASKER

Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	1	#1 for 110 WEEKS Taylor Swift	REPUBLIC	1	513
58	51	2	Billie Eilish	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	292
5	3	3	Morgan Wallen	BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	272
2	2	4	Kendrick Lamar	PGLANG/TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	438
8	6	5	Luke Combs	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	377
31	4	6	Post Malone	MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	413
9	8	7	Zach Bryan	BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	1	106
7	7	8	SZA	TOP DAWG/RCA	1	247
11	12	9	Benson Boone	NIGHT STREET/WARNER	6	18
13	17	10	Sabrina Carpenter	ISLAND/REPUBLIC	10	25
10	14	11	Shaboozey	AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE	9	6
12	15	12	Teddy Swims	SWIMS INT./WARNER	7	37
18	13	13	Tommy Richman	ISO SUPREMACY/PULSE RECORDS	13	4
15	9	14	Hozier	RUBYWORKS/COLUMBIA	3	122
19	18	15	Jelly Roll	BAILEE & BUDDY/BROKEN BOW/BMG/BBMG	4	97
21	22	16	Chris Stapleton	SOUND/MERCURY NASHVILLE/UMGN	1	448
3	10	17	Dua Lipa	WARNER	1	316
6	11	18	Drake	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	517
76	5	19	Gunna	GUNNA/YOUNG STONER LIFE/300/3EE	1	163
RE-ENTRY		20	Zayn	RCA	1	60

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2024 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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Concert Business Off To Record Start In 2024

Sphere's success hints at a new chapter for touring — as does the DOJ's Live Nation inquiry

BY DAVE BROOKS

U2 at Las Vegas' Sphere in 2023.

RICH FURY

CONCERT INDUSTRY EXPERTS generally thought 2024 would be a down year — or at least less busy than 2023, when Taylor Swift and Beyoncé catapulted the sector to new heights and challenged the personnel within it to keep pace amid its growth. But so far, 2024 hasn't brought much rest for the weary. The touring business is entering summer fueled by huge concert grosses unprecedented for the midyear mark, according to Billboard Boxscore.

At midyear, grosses for the top 10 entries on the Top Tours chart total $1.5 billion, up a staggering 83% from last year's figure of $814.9 million and marking the first time that the total gross of the top 10 tours combined have crossed $1 billion at the halfway point. Last year, only two tours — Elton John and Harry Styles — had generated more than $100 million at midyear. This year, eight had.

Leading the chart period, which spanned from Oct. 1, 2023, to March 30, 2024, is U2, which opened the new Sphere venue in Las Vegas with a residency that grossed $231.6 million from 38 shows during that time. (U2's full 40-date Sphere run grossed $244.5 million; the first two shows on Sept. 29 and 30 fell just

Top Tours

	Artist	Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	U2	$231.6M	630K	38
2	P!nk	$196M	1.4M	42
3	Madonna	$190.6M	959K	67
4	Luis Miguel	$165.6M	1.2M	62
5	Coldplay	$143.2M	1M	18
6	RBD	$140.4M	1.3M	35
7	Depeche Mode	$117.7M	860K	60
8	Eagles	$114.9M	399K	33
9	Travis Scott	$95.7M	686K	44
10	Enrique Iglesias, Pitbull & Ricky Martin	$92.9M	566K	43

P!nk

Scott

before the chart period.)

On the strength of her fall North American touring and February and March dates in Oceania, P!nk ranks second with $196 million grossed from 42 shows. Madonna logged 67 of her Celebration Tour's 80 dates during the period, grossing $190.6 million for a No. 3 rank; the trek wrapped in early May. Rounding out the chart's top 10 are three Latin tours (Luis Miguel; RBD; and Enrique Iglesias, Pitbull and Ricky Martin), three pop and rock acts (Coldplay, Depeche Mode and the Eagles) and Travis Scott, the sole hip-hop artist in the ranking's upper tier, who brought in $96 million from 44 North American arena shows on his Circus Maximus Tour, his first outing since the deadly 2021 Astroworld festival.

The increase in revenue for the chart period's top-earning tours compared with 2023, during what is normally the slower half of the year, is further evidence that, driven largely by international growth in Asia, South America and Australia, the concert business has become increasingly year-round. Live Nation, which has long advocated for steady, incremental international growth, leads the Top Promoters midyear chart with $2.8 billion grossed.

Live Nation's main competitor, AEG — No. 2 on Top Promoters with $976.8 million grossed — produced Taylor Swift's ongoing The Eras Tour through its partnership with Messina Touring Group and has also continued to expand its footprint globally. During the chart period, Swift, who has not reported her The Eras Tour data to *Billboard*, played 26 shows across South America, Australia and Asia.

SPHERE IS HERE

INDIVIDUAL MUSIC VENUES rarely change the entire touring landscape — but few facilities have captured the public's imagination quite like Las Vegas' Sphere. With its ground-breaking interior sound and video display — not to mention its light-up, skyline-dominating exterior — Sphere has created a new tier of high-end concert experience.

Top Promoters

	Promoter	Gross	Total Attendees	No. Of Shows
1	Live Nation	$2.8B	21.3M	2,166
2	AEG Presents	$976.8M	11.3M	4,930
3	OCESA	$403.2M	5.1M	732
4	MSG Entertainment	$163.7M	1.4M	272
5	SJM Concerts	$159.2M	2.3M	481
6	Outback Presents	$138.9M	1.7M	416
7	HYBE	$106.4M	778K	38
8	TEG Group	$92.6M	1.3M	492
9	MGM Resorts International	$79.9M	379K	149
10	Semmel Concerts	$68.6M	1.1M	407

Top Boxscores

	Artist(s) VENUE DATE	Gross TICKET PRICES	Total Attendees NO. OF SHOWS	Promoter(s)
1	**U2** SPHERE, LAS VEGAS OCT. 5, 7-8, 11, 13-14, 18, 20-21, 25, 27-28, NOV. 1, 3-4	**$96.8M** $390.97	**248K** 15	Live Nation
2	**U2** SPHERE, LAS VEGAS JAN. 26-27, 31, FEB. 2-3, 7, 9-10, 15, 17-18, 23-24, MARCH 1	**$84.7M** $340.08	**249K** 14	Live Nation
3	**U2** SPHERE, LAS VEGAS DEC. 1-2, 6, 8-9, 13, 15-16	**$50M** $376.86	**133K** 8	Live Nation
4	**Bruno Mars** TOKYO DOME, TOKYO JAN. 11, 13-14, 16, 18, 20-21	**$43.5M** $881.45/$67.49	**322K** 7	Live Nation
5	**Coldplay** NATIONAL STADIUM, SINGAPORE JAN. 23-24, 26-27, 30-31	**$43.4M** $222.16/$20.87	**321K** 6	Live Nation
6	**Usher** DOLBY LIVE, LAS VEGAS OCT. 11, 13-14, 18, 20, 22-23, 25, 27-28, NOV. 3-4, 7-8, 10-11, 21-22, 24-25, 29, DEC. 1-2	**$31.6M** $800.09/$80.09	**105K** 23	Live Nation, MGM Resorts International
7	**RBD** FORO SOL, MEXICO CITY NOV. 30-DEC. 3, 16-17	**$28.3M** $81.80	**346K** 6	OCESA
8	**Corona Capital** AUTODROMO HERMANOS RODRIGUEZ, MEXICO CITY NOV. 17-19	**$26.5M** $122.76	**216K** 3	OCESA
9	**Pa'l Norte** PARQUE FUNDIDORA, MONTERREY, MEXICO MARCH 29-31	**$26.2M** $121.23	**216K** 3	OCESA
10	**P!nk** MARVEL STADIUM, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA FEB. 23-24, MARCH 12-13	**$24.8M** $196.77/$65.54	**231K** 4	Live Nation

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>
> —MARK SHULMAN, UBS ARENA

U2's No. 1 ranking on Top Tours was driven solely by the 38 *U2:UV Achtung Baby Live at Sphere* shows from Oct. 1, 2023, through the residency's conclusion on March 2, 2024. Those concerts grossed $231.6 million from 630,000 tickets sold, with U2 averaging a $6.1 million gross per show from an average ticket price of $368. While a few megastars have earned more from Vegas residencies, none have ever earned so much from that few shows played.

While those in the industry largely view fans' willingness to increasingly shell out for premium concert experiences as a net positive, some live executives predict other parts of the sector — festivals, namely — may begin to feel a competitive pinch.

"It's already getting difficult for festivals to find headliners," says Wasserman Music agent Sam Hunt, who represents major acts such as Diplo, Run the Jewels and The xx, noting that artists used to make substantially more money headlining festivals than headlining arenas. But new ticket-pricing tools have significantly increased what artists can make playing arenas.

That shift in financial posture for the touring business comes amid increasingly frequent festival cancellations. Those woes have extended to the top of the market: This year, Coachella was slow to sell after its initial on-sale and ended up down about 20% in attendance compared with 2023.

Given the choice between festivals and headlining concerts at arenas and stadiums, fans are increasingly choosing the latter. "There is no more comfortable way to enjoy a show than an arena — especially the newer facilities," says Mark Shulman, senior vp of programming at UBS Arena in Elmont, N.Y., just outside of Queens, which opened in late 2021. "The modern arena is a concert palace, with incredible acoustics, comfortable seats and tons of bathrooms, plus all kinds of food and beverage options."

Miguel

ALEXANDER TAMARGO/GETTY IMAGES

Top Venues

15,001 OR MORE CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendees	No. Of Shows
1	**Sphere** LAS VEGAS	$231.6M	629.5K	38
2	**Madison Square Garden** NEW YORK	$155.5M	1M	70
3	**O2 Arena** LONDON	$135.6M	1.4M	115
4	**United Center** CHICAGO	$68.5M	362K	23
5	**Barclays Center** BROOKLYN	$65M	596K	63
6	**Scotiabank Arena** TORONTO	$64.2M	522K	38
7	**T-Mobile Arena** LAS VEGAS	$63.1M	393K	32
8	**TD Garden** BOSTON	$61M	585K	54
9	**Prudential Center** NEWARK, N.J.	$60.2M	563K	62
10	**State Farm Arena** ATLANTA	$56.3M	527K	51

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendees	No. Of Shows
1	**Dickies Arena** FORT WORTH, TEXAS	$53.2M	713K	94
2	**Moody Center** AUSTIN	$51.8M	391K	43
3	**OVO Hydro** GLASGOW	$44M	638K	76
4	**CFG Bank Arena** BALTIMORE	$36.9M	460K	71
5	**Uber Arena** BERLIN	$33.3M	388K	49
6	**OVO Arena Wembley** LONDON	$32.9M	470K	69
7	**Hallenstadion** ZURICH	$32.8M	298K	48
8	**Footprint Center** PHOENIX	$32.2M	180K	15
9	**Barclays Arena** HAMBURG, GERMANY	$27.5M	443K	70
10	**Acrisure Arena** PALM DESERT, CALIF.	$22.8M	170K	24

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FOX THEATRE ATLANTA

Madonna

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

DOJ LAWSUIT LOOMS

THE SECTOR'S MOMENTUM may be hindered by the lawsuit filed by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in late May seeking to break up Live Nation and Ticketmaster 14 years after the government approved the merger of the two companies. Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia joined the lawsuit, which alleges an illegal monopoly in the live-entertainment industry. "It is time to break up Live Nation-Ticketmaster," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement announcing the suit.

For the government to prove that Live Nation is a monopoly, it must demonstrate that the company has a dominant market share. Though *Billboard*'s midyear report only measures the top line of the concert market — during the slowest two quarters of the year — it offers context about the megapromoter's clout.

Take the Top Promoters chart. Live Nation and AEG rank first and second, respectively, and are followed at No. 3 by OCESA — the Mexican promotion company Live Nation purchased in December 2021 — with $403 million in sales. Of the $5.4 billion spent globally on concert tickets to events promoted by the top 20 promoters during the midyear period, according to Boxscore, Live Nation and OCESA accounted for $3.2 billion in sales — about 60%.

That tracks closely to the Top Tours chart, where 31 tours — nearly two-thirds of the overall list of 50 — were produced by Live Nation. Of the top 10 tours, only one, Luis Miguel, wasn't produced by the company. (If Swift reported data for her AEG-produced The Eras Tour, the latter number would've likely been two. *Billboard*'s analysis is based on global data that is voluntarily reported to Billboard Boxscore by promoters, venues and artists.)

A large part of the DOJ's inquiry into Live Nation will revolve around its ownership of Ticketmaster, which it acquired in 2010, and the platform's current market share of the concert ticketing business. *Billboard* found that 69 of the top 100 venues across Boxscore's five highest-capacity charts at midyear were Ticketmaster clients. b

Top Venues

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

	Venue / LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendees	No. Of Shows
1	**Radio City Music Hall** NEW YORK	$130.5M	1.2M	224
2	**Dolby Live** LAS VEGAS	$58.2M	196K	40
3	**Auditorio Nacional** MEXICO CITY	$49.6M	896K	104
4	**Mohegan Sun Arena** UNCASVILLE, CONN.	$23.8M	329K	66
5	**The Theater at Madison Square Garden** NEW YORK	$18.7M	203K	50
6	**Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** HOLLYWOOD, FLA.	$18.6M	103K	20
7	**Red Rocks Amphitheatre** MORRISON, COLO.	$18M	288K	36
8	**YouTube Theater** INGLEWOOD, CALIF.	$15.7M	171K	45
9	**Peacock Theater** LOS ANGELES	$12.4M	148K	33
10	**Bill Graham Civic Auditorium** SAN FRANCISCO	$11.1M	162K	21

5,000 OR LESS CAPACITY

	Venue / LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendees	No. Of Shows
1	**Fox Theatre** ATLANTA	$34.5M	434K	110
2	**Beacon Theatre** NEW YORK	$29.1M	290K	110
3	**Chicago Theatre** CHICAGO	$23.7M	332K	103
4	**Resorts World Theatre** LAS VEGAS	$20M	143K	37
5	**Broward Center for the Performing Arts, Au-Rene Theater** FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.	$19.4M	213K	118
6	**Teatro Telcel** MEXICO CITY	$14M	248K	237
7	**Altria Theater** RICHMOND, VA.	$13.7M	198K	73
8	**Encore Theater at Wynn Resort** LAS VEGAS	$13.2M	82.1K	59
9	**David A. Straz Jr. Center for the Performing Arts, Morsani Hall** TAMPA, FLA.	$11.6M	133K	70
10	**Fallsview Casino Resort** NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO	$11M	179K	44

AEG PRESENTS
#2 TOP PROMOTER

ZACH BRYAN
TOP COUNTRY TOUR

THE O2
#3 TOP VENUE 15,000+

T-MOBILE ARENA LAS VEGAS
#7 TOP VENUE 15,000+

BARCLAYS ARENA HAMBURG
#9 TOP VENUE 10,001 - 15,000

CRYPTO.COM ARENA
#14 TOP VENUE 15,000+

AEG PRESENTS

AJR ANDREA BOCELLI BILLY STRINGS
CHARM CITY IS CAPTIVATING THE WORLD
FALL OUT BOY
CFG BANK ARENA
LIL WAYNE MARIAH CAREY
4TH HIGHEST GROSSING VENUE
WORLDWIDE
10,001 – 15,000 CAPACITY
QUEEN + ADAM LAMBERT ROD WAVE
THANK YOU TO THE ARTISTS, PROMOTERS, TOURS, FANS, AND
ARENA TEAM WHO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE. WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED.
TOOL TRAVIS SCOTT TYLER CHILDERS
XSCAPE 98 ROCK SPRING THING
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
OVG
OAK VIEW GROUP

market

PG. 30 ARTISTS ARE SLOW TO ADOPT AI TOOLS
PG. 32 MUSIC IP INVESTORS SEE SECURITIZATION SURGE
PG. 34 MIKE LUBA ON FOREST HILLS STADIUM'S SUCCESS

MUSIC AND MONEY

Losing Their Shirts

Artist reps say the 20% to 25% cut that venues take of their merchandise sales is exorbitant, especially at clubs: "You're just providing a lobby and a table"

BY STEVE KNOPPER // ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER

ARTISTS AT COUNTRY singer-songwriter Ashley McBryde's level of popularity can sell $16,000 to $20,000 worth of T-shirts and hoodies when they play 1,500-capacity venues. Layne Weber, director of merchandising and fan engagement for McBryde's management company, Q Prime, says some venues took a 20% to 25% cut of her merchandise sales during her spring tour — which is standard in the industry but, he says, exorbitant for services rendered at many clubs. "I went to a show the other night and the merch table was next to the bar," Weber says. "The merch seller was having to compete with the bartender who's trying to sell the drinks. That was a venue taking 20% of the sales."

Weber's complaints, which many artists and their representatives share, are at the center of a long-running live-industry debate over merch percentages. For decades, artists, venues and promoters have haggled behind the scenes over percentages as part of every show contract, but they contend the stakes are now much higher. "Ever since we've come back from COVID, the merch numbers have gone through the roof for all genres of music," says Crom Tidwell, owner of Crom Tidwell Merchandising in Nashville. And with so much money at stake, artists want a larger percentage of their own profits.

The U.S. Department of Justice sued to break up Live Nation, alleging it was in breach of U.S. antitrust laws.

The **Mechanical Licensing Collective** filed a lawsuit against **Spotify** over its decision to reclassify its premium plan as a bundle.

"Bands are getting ripped off," says Barry Drinkwater, executive chairman of Global Merchandising Services, which handles merch for top metal acts such as Iron Maiden and Guns N' Roses. He adds that the venue's cut particularly hurts small acts, which tour on slimmer margins and often operate their own merch tables. "They need the money that gets them food, gets them to the next show," he says. "Then the promoter wants to charge them 20% of the gross."

Live Nation has expressed sympathy for this point of view. Last fall, trumpeting an endorsement from Willie Nelson, the world's biggest concert promoter unveiled its On the Road Again program, which eliminates merch-selling fees for artists at its clubs and provides a per diem of $1,500 in gas and travel cash for artists, among other benefits. Earlier this year, Live Nation president/CEO Michael Rapino told *Billboard* that the program had "already helped support 3,000 developing artists," and a statement that Live Nation issued on May 22 said, "We're incredibly proud of how On the Road Again is supporting thousands of artists and their crews, with 100% merch profits, $1,500

TikTok and parent company **ByteDance** sued over a law that would require the Chinese company to sell the app or face a U.S. ban.

Universal Music Group shareholders approved chairman/CEO **Lucian Grainge's** 2023 pay package worth $128 million.

cash nightly for gas and travel costs and more. Developing artists are the future of live music, and we're proud to keep this program rolling strong."

Complaints over merch fees are not limited to clubs, however. At arenas, stadiums and other large venues, in-house concessions staff take over merch sales, and the 20% to 25% cut goes largely to these services. And at least one venue takes an even bigger chunk. Drinkwater says New York's Madison Square Garden (MSG) charges artists 30% of their merch sales, plus credit card fees. He also notes that percentages can be higher in the United Kingdom. (A representative for the Garden declined to comment.)

Whether artists are handling their own merch tables or relying on in-house staffers, managers say they're often unsatisfied with the services they get, given the cost.

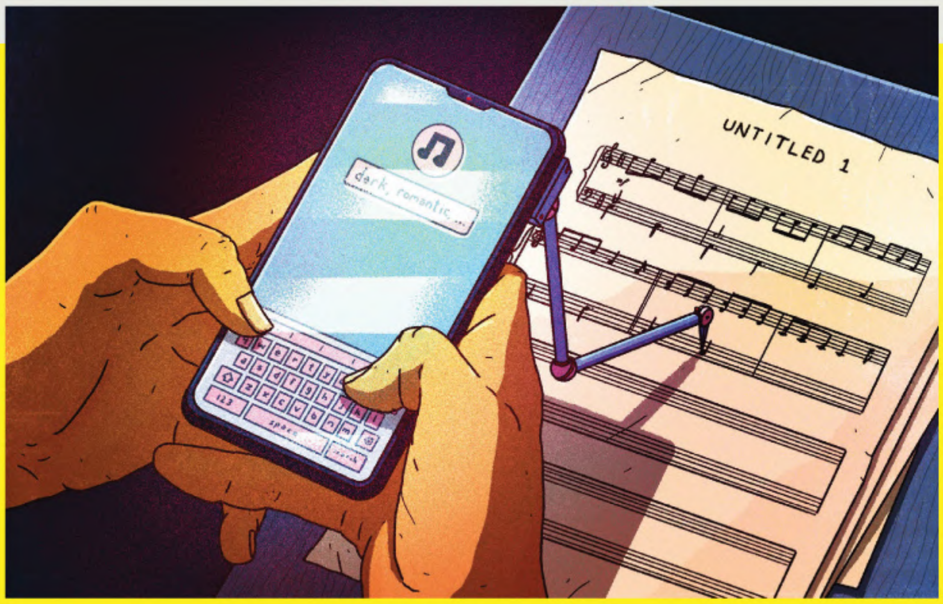
"I don't feel they're worth 25% of the revenue," says Rick Sales, who manages Slayer, Ghost, Mastodon and others. "It's not good value for the money spent."

Venue reps counter that long before fans step into their buildings, they negotiate deals with artists, including merch percentages. Not surprisingly, those with leverage receive favorable terms. "Every live performance is a negotiation," a concert-business source says. "The band doesn't like the merch percentage, find somewhere else to play." Venue consultant Brock Jones, the former GM of Nashville's Bridgestone Arena, adds: "At the end of the day, venues have got to make money, too — electricity isn't free, all that space isn't free. Venues have to recoup those expenses. An 80/20 merch deal is absolutely fair when the venue is selling."

Tidwell agrees that it's a different story at arenas, which often are required to staff union employees at fixed salaries. "You've got to have a crew to facilitate the sales," he says. "Somebody has to pay for the help." But he also contends that artists complaining about high venue percentages in small venues have a point: "What are you doing for your 20%? You're just providing a lobby and a table."

Some small venues, still reeling from the pandemic, have expressed concern that Live Nation's On the Road Again program might pressure them into following suit and giving up a crucial revenue source. "Temporary measures may appear to help artists in the short run but actually can squeeze out independent venues, which provide the lifeblood of many artists on thin margins," the National Independent Venue Association said in a statement in September.

Arenas and stadiums are where the big merch money is. On her The Eras Tour last year, Taylor Swift made a reported $200 million on T-shirts and other goods sold at shows. In its 2023 financial report, Live Nation claimed "double-digit growth" in merch and concessions at the arenas it owns or operates, such as the Moody Center in Austin. Notably, the On the Road Again program does not apply to large venues. Drinkwater says the standard 20% to 25% cut applies and, like MSG, sometimes venues pass on credit card fees (usually 5%) to the artist. "We try with our artists to beat this down," he says. "Sometimes we get a reduction if we can do big sales." ▣



De-Generation?

Music executives say the average consumer has been slow to adopt AI tools for song creation

THE INTRODUCTION and rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence apps and tools since late 2022 have understandably resulted in a fair amount of doomsaying about song creation. But some AI music executives say they're not seeing the predicted rush by users without musical training to create tunes using their tools.

"For whatever reason, you're just not seeing an extreme level of adoption of these products yet among the everyday consumer," says one founder of an AI music company who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "Where's the 80 [million] to 100 million users on this stuff?"

"We were all talking about how artists are screwed" — replaced by civilians who will suddenly be able to unlock their creativity — "because that's a dramatic story," says Antony Demekhin, co-founder of the music creation and editing platform Tuney. "To me, what's more likely is these tools just get integrated into the existing ecosystem, and people start using it as a source for material like a Splice," which provides artists and producers sample packs full of musical building blocks.

Two generative AI music companies that have sparked many headlines this year are Suno and Udio. The former recently announced that 10 million users have tested it in eight months, while the latter told *Bloomberg* that 600,000 people tried its song-generation product in the first two weeks. Neither company said how many of those testers became regular users, however. Compare this with ChatGPT, which was estimated to gain 100 million weekly users within two months. (That said, there's tech industry chatter that growth is leveling off there, too.)

Mike Caren, founder of the label and publishing company Artist Partner Group and a generative AI proponent, says to give it time. "People aren't that fast to change their approach. Musicians are creative, but they're also creatures of habit."

Diaa El All, founder and CEO of AI music generator Soundful — which he says has a user count in the seven figures — contends the number of competing companies and the difficulty of judging their output are also factors slowing adoption as users attempt to determine "What's the quality?" He suspects they are "just jumping from one tool to the other to the other and testing out the market."

Caren also says that "a lot of people are going to use a product that's not that good, have a bad experience and they're not going to come back for six months or a year." And, he adds, "Other people will use decent products, but they won't have prompt experience" — in other words, it will take time for them to learn how to ask the song generator to make what they want — "so they'll prompt wrong, and then they'll have a bad experience and be gone for a while."

Then there's the uncertain regulatory climate. The U.S. Copyright Office stated last year that "if a work's traditional elements of authorship were produced by a machine, the work lacks human authorship and the Office will not register it," which could limit its commercial value.

Labels and publishers also argue that tech companies must sign licensing agreements before they can train their AI tools on large data sets of their songs, and there is recent speculation that litigation will result over these claims. Until the rules surrounding training are clarified, "corporate brands don't want any of the risk" that comes with opening themselves up to potential litigation, says Chris Walch, co-founder and CEO of generative AI company Lifescore.

AI music leaders also believe song-generation technology still suffers from a bad reputation. "The 'tech-lash' and the stigma is really unexpected and very powerful," says the AI music company founder. "Even regular people just feel icky about it, like, 'Didn't they steal all the music in order to make this work?' "

Caren predicts that first musicians, then creators will take up AI tools, followed by fans and "music aficionados" who want to express appreciation for artists by making something. "How far it penetrates to people who are not significant music fans?" he asks. "I don't know." —ELIAS LEIGHT

 ILLUSTRATION BY LAURENT HRYBYK

CONGRATULATIONS
MOODY JONES

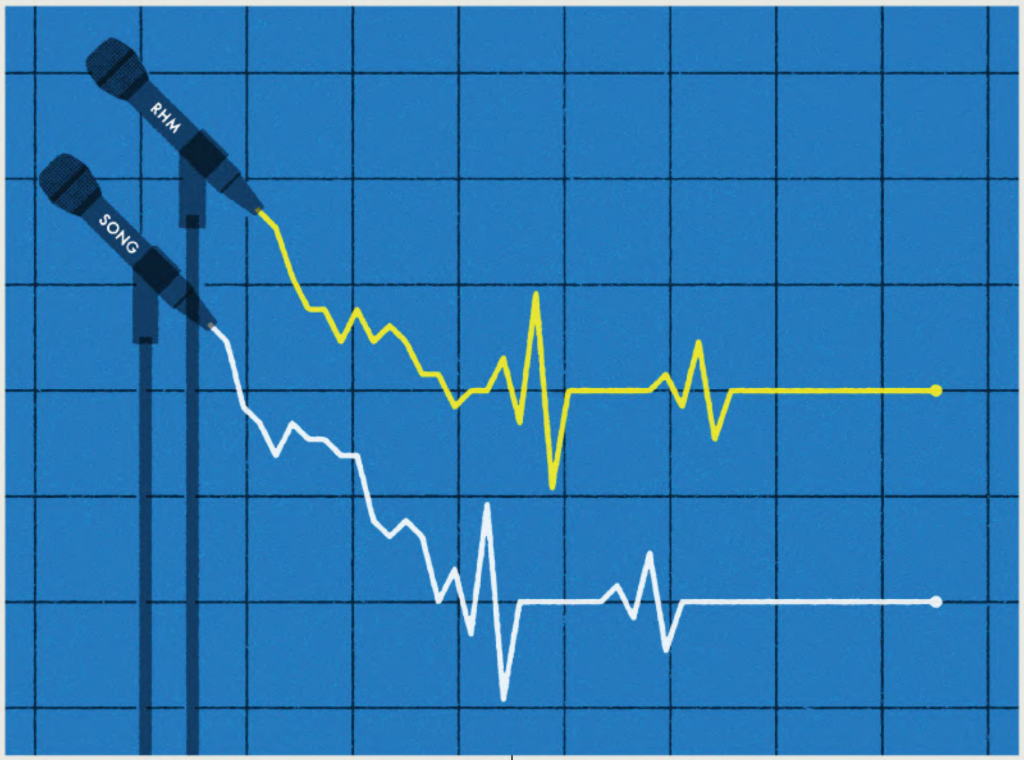
Concord officially called off its $1.51 billion bid for **Hipgnosis Songs Fund**.

Sony Music published a declaration warning tech companies not to mine its catalog for AI training.

INVESTORS WANT KILLER ABS

As public song portfolio funds disappear, investors are turning to asset-backed securitizations

BY ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL AND GLENN PEOPLES



THIS JULY, roughly six years after the debut of Hipgnosis Songs Fund (HSF) on the London Stock Exchange, the relatively short-lived experiment of publicly traded catalog funds — also known as investment trusts — will likely end. Global investment giant Blackstone is expected to win over at least three-quarters of HSF's shareholders with its $1.6 billion offer to buy the 65,000-song catalog.

The only other listed fund, Round Hill Music Royalty Fund, was taken private in November when Concord acquired it for $468 million. But though their runs were short, these funds transformed how the investment world sees music. Hipgnosis founder Merck Mercuriadis led the charge to convince institutional investors of the stable, noncyclical nature of song rights, and they poured billions into the asset class, bid up the prices of song catalogs to unprecedented heights and fueled a frenzy for acquisitions, which meant creators got more money than ever for selling the rights to their work.

Investments in music royalties keep thriving in the private market — where the Hipgnosis and Round Hill funds continue to do business — but the money is now flowing to asset-backed securities, the same financial vehicle used to create "Bowie bonds" in the 1990s. In the past two years, Concord, Kobalt, HarbourView Equity Partners, Chord Music Partners and others have raised $3.3 billion using securitizations, and music intellectual property investors say money of that magnitude will help keep catalog prices and multiples near record-high levels.

Despite the game-changing effect that the Hipgnosis and Round Hill funds had on the music business, they faced a number of stumbling blocks. For one, investors "misunderstood" the way that music copyright grants administrative control to the owner, Round Hill co-founder Josh Gruss says. This was borne out by the due diligence report HSF released in March, which indicated investors didn't comprehend the rights HSF had acquired or the lack of control it had over much of its portfolio.

But interest rates may have been the death knell. When rates were low, HSF and Round Hill offered attractive returns for an acceptable level of risk, but when rates began rising, the funds' dividends weren't nearly as attractive. By the end of 2022, the Bank of England's official bank rate rose to 3.5%, which put downward pressure on HSF's share price because the risk-free rate wasn't far from the fund's dividend. Round Hill was similarly affected. "If you can put your money in the bank and earn 4.5%," Gruss says, "Round Hill should not [pay investors] 4.5%."

HSF had other problems, too, including sizable debt and the lasting pall cast by a Sept. 7, 2022, *Financial Times* article that described HSF's stalled growth as interest rates rose and a subdued share price that left the fund unable to sell additional shares to fund catalog acquisitions. "If the [*Financial Times*] thinks it's a problem, it's likely going to be a problem," says Philipp Saure of ContourMusik, a firm that specializes in private securitizations of music assets.

Had HSF been founded today, it may have put more focus on asset-backed securitizations. First deployed in the music business by David Bowie in 1997 to raise $55 million from his recorded-music catalog, they allow companies that own music rights to sell debt, using music royalties as collateral.

The size of recent ABS deals dwarf the money raised by Bowie bonds. In 2022, Concord brokered a $1.8 billion securitization, and Chord, a venture of KKR Credit Advisors and Dundee Partners, did one for $733 million. Hipgnosis Song Management, a different Hipgnosis company that advises HSF, also raised $222 million through an ABS that year. In 2024, HarbourView and Kobalt put together $500 million and $267 million ABS deals, respectively, and sources say that far more unpublicized securitizations have closed in recent years.

$3.3B

Money raised through asset-backed capital securitizations over the past two years by Concord, Chord, Kobalt and others.

While both the ABS and investment trust models let investors buy into recorded-music and publishing royalties, there are key differences between the two. ABS debt is purchased by institutional investors such as pension funds and insurance companies with time horizons that match the long durations of music assets. "They're not as impatient [as retail investors]," Saure says, "so you don't have this 'trial in the court of public opinion' element."

Institutional investors' need for a specific rate of return is an approach that works well with established music catalogs that consistently generate cash. Shares in Universal Music Group or Warner Music Group are "speculative" investments that could lose money or produce double-digit gains, says a bank source, who adds that "public investors are growth investors, not just cash flow investors" who seek a steady return. In contrast, ABS investors know exactly what to expect over a specific period.

ABS deals are complex and involve ongoing administration and generally high costs, but they can be worth the effort. "Each structure has its pros and cons, and each is better-suited to varying market conditions," Reservoir Media CEO Golnar Khosrowshahi says. "Securitization today is attractive because it lowers [the] cost of capital in this interest rate environment."

Concord CFO Kent Hoskins says he prefers the flexibility of securitizations over traditional debt. "We've very much liked the capital structure that allowed us to relatively easily draw new debt for new acquisitions." An ABS creates a trust that manages a collection of assets that acts as collateral for investors. If Concord is within its covenants, such as a specific loan-to-value ratio — the size of a loan compared with the value of an asset purchased with the loan — he explains, the company can get more debt out of a catalog's particular value. Term loans are more restrictive, he adds, and give the borrower a lower loan-to-value ratio. Concord did an ABS deal in 2022 with what Hoskins calls a "relatively low" loan-to-value ratio in the "low 40s" compared with ABS deals that he says have gone as high as 65%. That buffer allowed the music company to do another issuance in 2023 for $500 million, which funded its $468 million acquisition of the Round Hill Music Royalty Fund in November.

Music may be a recession-proof, stable commodity, but well-diversified ABS deals aren't without their risks. One source points to artificial intelligence as a factor that could jeopardize stable cash flows if it causes a major economic shift like pirated music did in the early 2000s.

In general, though, institutional investors see music as a safe asset class over time. "There has been strong demand for every music ABS deal we have done," the same source says. "As some of the retail money is walking away," Saure adds, "institutions are becoming more confident."

Congratulations

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40 under 40

Luba photographed May 10 at Forest Hills Stadium in Queens.

From The Desk Of... Mike Luba

EXECUTIVE VP OF STRATEGY, LIVE NATION; PARTNER, TIEBREAKER PRODUCTIONS

BY FRANK DIGIACOMO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NINA WESTERVELT

AT THE BEGINNING of 2013, Mike Luba says he dragged Mumford & Sons' Ben Lovett to Forest Hills Stadium in Queens on a sort of vision quest. He was working with the band on its Gentlemen of the Road Tour and knew that Lovett had grown up in the tennis town of Wimbledon, England. An avid tennis fan and player himself, Luba wanted to sell the band on "playing a gig at the Wimbledon of New York." Built in the 1920s, the stadium, which adjoins and is owned by the West Side Tennis Club (WSTC), had been the site of the U.S. Open for six decades and, in the '60s and '70s, hosted a series of landmark concerts by The Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, Barbra Streisand, Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan, to name a few. But those days had long since passed when Luba says Lovett "took two steps into the site, which at that point had trees growing out of compost piles in the bowl and hadn't been touched in decades. Ben looked at me and said, 'This is nothing like Wimbledon. It's a total fucking train wreck. But we can do a proper rock show here.'

"That was early 2013," Luba recalls. "They played that August. That's how fast I did that."

Almost 11 years after that first concert, Forest Hills Stadium has evolved into the Chateau Marmont of outdoor venues. Luba and his team have restored much of its '20s vintage vibe and rehabbed a dozen or so funkily decorated speakeasy-style rooms that ring the stadium floor. (One is entered through a port-a-potty; another, a phone booth.)

A self-described "hippie punk-rock dude," Luba says the stadium, which has a capacity of about 13,000, will stage "30-ish" events this season in a hyper-competitive market for venues. Neil Young and Crazy Horse, Hozier, The National, The War on Drugs, Khruangbin, Tiësto, King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard and Pitbull are among those that have played or will play this season.

The stadium's box office has grown accordingly. In 2019, it grossed $6.7 million; in 2023, it took in $22.1 million and finished at No. 17 for the year among venues with capacities between 10,001 and 15,000, according to Billboard Boxscore. Along with that success, however, came an ongoing legal battle with the local homeowners association, the Forest Hills Gardens Corporation (FHGC), over alleged noise levels and unruly crowds.

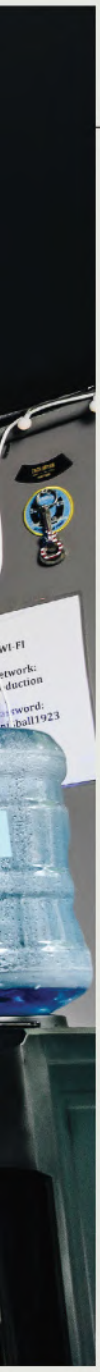
Luba had much to say about the contretemps during this conversation with *Billboard*, which took place in the small hut where he works on the stadium grounds. He also discussed his unique employment arrangement. Luba is a partner in Tiebreaker Productions — which holds a long-term lease to the stadium — with his previous full-time employer, AEG, and its subsidiary The Bowery Presents, as well as some overachiever friends from his high school tennis team. Since last July, he is also Live Nation's executive vp of strategy. (It's his second turn at the company: He worked with then-chairman Michael Cohl in the early 2000s.) Given the rivalry between the two live-industry giants, his dual roles can be a tightrope walk.

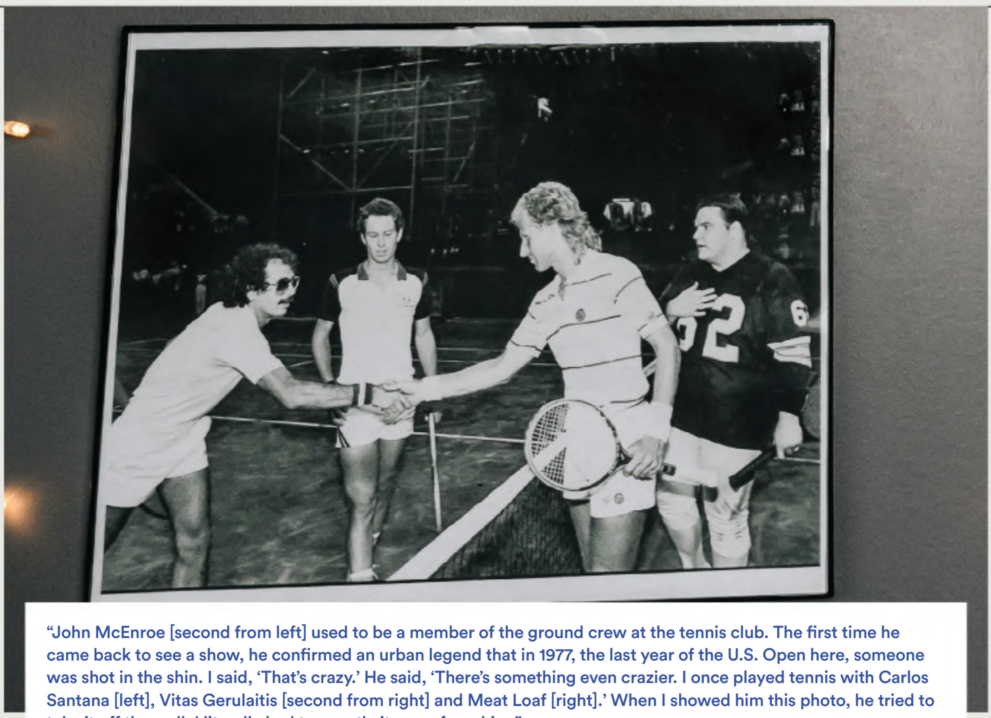
Eleven years later, how has the stadium evolved?

We realized early on that the place itself was inherently magical. So we just leaned into making it feel like when you come here it's in its 1920s state, but we are using 2024 technology. So much of the credit for that goes to [stadium GM] Jason Brandt and the work that was

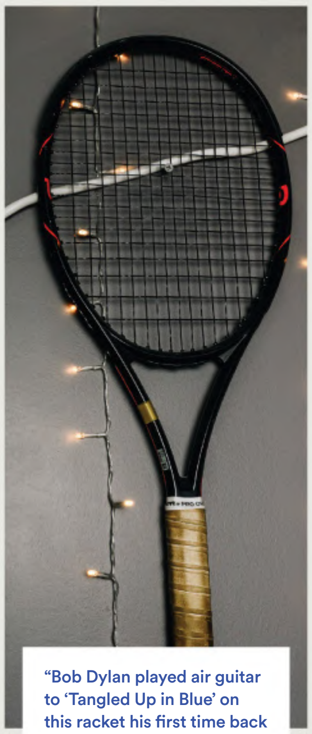
Downtown Music named **Tom Allen** president of its new royalties and financial services division.

Tomas Rodríguez will lead **Warner Music's** newly restructured Mexican music division.





"John McEnroe [second from left] used to be a member of the ground crew at the tennis club. The first time he came back to see a show, he confirmed an urban legend that in 1977, the last year of the U.S. Open here, someone was shot in the shin. I said, 'That's crazy.' He said, 'There's something even crazier. I once played tennis with Carlos Santana [left], Vitas Gerulaitis [second from right] and Meat Loaf [right].' When I showed him this photo, he tried to take it off the wall. I literally had to wrestle it away from him."



"Bob Dylan played air guitar to 'Tangled Up in Blue' on this racket his first time back at the stadium," Luba says.

done. For years, every penny we made got poured back into it. The food and beverage program has totally been elevated. I'm personally most proud of the fact that we now have real bathrooms that are plumbed into the main sewer system of the city. We're tied into the power grid instead of having to bring in generators. We've put in tons of points of sale for bars so there's no lines. The load-in went from being three days to four hours. You can pull your trucks right up to the stage. It has really reduced the impact on trucks coming in and out of the neighborhood.

How did you build your season lineup from a few shows to around 30?
It was really word-of-mouth. The bands told other bands. The crews told other crews. And then people who came to shows told other people. Our original ticketing system was Ticketfly, so we had no mailing list. There was no institutional way to market.

When did your battle with the Forest Hills Gardens Corporation begin?
This was the first master-planned neighborhood ever in America, and it happened to include the tennis club and the stadium. The governing body is the Forest Hills Gardens Corporation, with whom we had an incredible relationship for a decade — multiple presidents, multiple boards. It's an all-volunteer board, and it changes every couple of years. We did everything in consultation with them, we paid them, and at the end of every season, we would sit down and have a post-mortem of what was good, what was bad and give them a check.

They had an election and a new president [Anthony Oprisiu] comes in. It turns out he has a serious grudge against the tennis club. There are all sorts of rumors about what it is. Whatever it is, there's no rational anything. [Editor's note: A spokesman for the club denies this, saying, "The FHGC board — made up of 15 members — voted unanimously to commence litigation because of the WSTC and Tiebreaker's unacceptable behavior."]

So this beef is more about the tennis club than the concerts?
Yeah, but we're the easy target. The tropes are so prevalent: rock'n'roll, people creating garbage, pissing everywhere, puking everywhere. And it's just not true. However, to the general public, it all sounds reasonable. This guy and like three to five board members are like the Matt Gaetzes, Marjorie Taylor Greenes — the Freedom Caucus of Forest Hills. They are willing to destroy it for the 600 people who work here on every show.

You gave the corporation a check at the end of each season, and they wanted more?
They wanted $100,000 a show instead of the $5,000 we were paying them. If we wanted to book 20 or more shows, it went to $200,000 a show.

"This is a bobblehead of the master electrician at the stadium, Tommy Sellers. He has been here for basically every show that has been at the stadium, and he's the spiritual leader for the crew."

How did they arrive at those numbers?
They made some calculation based on gross ticket sales and attendance, with zero knowledge of our costs. Basically, the only way we survive is selling beer. We have no parking. The bands take all the money, and we're competing with [Madison Square] Garden, Barclays Center, Central Park, Prospect Park, UBS Arena, Jones Beach and on and on. No one is cutting anyone a deal. [Editor's note: According to the FHGC spokesman, due to its "decadeslong relationship" with the stadium, it did not charge the market price it charges other entities for closing its streets. He adds, "In light of the stadium's unwillingness to work in partnership with the FHGC, the FHGC is no longer willing to subsidize the operational costs of the stadium."]

Where do things stand now?
We got an injunction, which remains in place while this is being litigated. Most of the lawsuit is to make us follow the law and pull the proper permits, which we've always done and will continue to do. The judge granted their request to have an independent sound monitor here for every show. We had suggested that the [Department of Environmental Protection] be the independent monitor. They've dinged us when we've been out of code. They're a city agency. They have no horse in the race.

What does the tennis club make of this?
This tennis club is the largest member of the Forest Hills Gardens Corporation. They pay more dues than anyone else. They sued the board for breach of candor and breach of their fiduciary duty because essentially the club is going to be funding the lawsuit against itself. [Editor's note: In a statement, Oprisiu said, "FHGC remains open to a compromise that respects our community and historic norms of behavior at the club. To date, [the WSTC] and Tiebreaker have yet to share a meaningful proposal for our community to consider. Instead, they have recently tripled the number of events and focused on personal attacks on the board with offensive innuendos and gossip. We're confident in our legal standing as recently supported by the court's ruling."]

How did you come to work for Live Nation?
When my deal was potentially coming up at AEG, [Live Nation chief strategy officer] Jordan Zachary called. I was ready to move on. It finally all worked out, and Live Nation gave me this incredible opportunity. I get to work on tours with artists that I love and care about. I get to help them on [business development] when they do new building projects or any kind of venue stuff, and I get to participate a little bit on the big-picture strategy.

How does Forest Hills fit in with your Live Nation work?
From day one, Forest Hills was an open room, like the Garden or the Staples Center. When AEG [took a stake in Tiebreaker], they became the promoter partner, but if there was a band that wanted Live Nation to promote their tour, they would come in. This year, half of the shows we do will be Live Nation and half will be Bowery. When I started back at Live Nation, we began to educate the industry that the idea of playing Jones Beach and Forest Hills is now possible. You look on a map and they're 27 or so miles apart, but for those who live here, they might as well be Mars and Jupiter. There's an ecosystem now where Pitbull can play Jones Beach and Forest Hills, as he will, and both will sell out.

How do you balance the Live Nation-AEG equation?
My real job is at Live Nation, and my partners here are Bowery and AEG. The companies clearly don't like each other, so it's a little tricky. There's real-life proprietary shit that I'm dead serious about, and I keep it very, very separate. That's why I sit out here by myself. I'll go into the Live Nation office once in a while, but I try to stay out of all the drama. I'm really thankful that both AEG and Live Nation let me exist in this space. And it's important to me that Live Nation understands that I'm on the Live Nation team.

Emily Stephenson

President

Downtown Music Publishing

DOWNTOWN

The Music Industry Lives Here

Murph photographed May 13 in Malibu, Calif.

21 under 21

Music's next generation of superstars is breaking online and busting down genre barriers — something that Jessie Murph has done from day one, exploring new sounds and defining her identity on her "unexpected" debut album

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS // PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATHRYN BOYD BROLIN

AS COUNTRY MUSIC softly plays from a portable speaker near the pool of a private residence in Malibu, Calif., Jessie Murph is posing on the steps of an Airstream in her footwear of choice: Timberland boots with Western-inspired denim leg warmers. The style seems to riff on her favorite shoe, the snoot: part sneaker, part cowboy boot — and a perfect representation of the artist herself.

"Being from Alabama, country music was always around me," recalls Murph, who grew up idolizing Adele, Amy Winehouse and Drake. "For a long time I resented that part of myself, so I tried to shy away from it. But then, just through accepting shit, it started to seep into my music more and more."

That through line has since helped the 19-year-old artist carve a singular lane in a crowded field of young talent. Yet at a time when country music is enjoying a mainstream high, Murph is contemplating just how much she wants to lean in. "I'm trying to decide that for myself because I feel like everybody's doing it now," she says with a quick sigh. "So it almost makes me want to do something a little different because I feel like [country music] is beginning to be saturated."

Still, on her forthcoming debut album due out this year, Murph — who seamlessly skips among country, hip-hop and biting pop — plans to blend them all across the tracklist. She has already proved her chops in each lane, appearing on Diplo's *Diplo Presents Thomas Wesley: Chapter 2 — Swamp Savant* alongside Polo G and, most recently, scoring her highest-charting Billboard Hot 100 entry with "Wild Ones" alongside country hit-maker Jelly Roll. "That is truly one of the best people I've ever met," Murph says of Jelly. "I feel like I could go to him about anything."

Being raised in a "musical household" in Athens, Ala. — with a population of nearly 30,000 — Murph started writing songs when she was 9 years old. By 11, she was posting covers on TikTok and YouTube, nailing everything from David Guetta and Sia's "Titanium" to Billie Eilish's "Ocean Eyes" to Post Malone's more singer-songwriter-based hits like "Feeling Whitney" and "Stay."

After Murph started gaining traction online, her mother, a former musician, helped her daughter navigate the offers rolling in through email. (At the time, Murph was being homeschooled during the pandemic.) She signed a management deal with Disruptor's Adam Alpert and Julie Leff in 2020, followed by a major-label deal with Columbia in 2021. Her debut single, the brooding and edgy "Upgrade," arrived with a music video in which Murph dressed in a simple black outfit with slicked-back hair.

"That feels like a lifetime ago," she says today, noting how much she has honed her style — and, as a result, her sound — since then. "From where I grew up, the style was really preppy, so I used to dress like that in high school. But as I found myself through music, I found myself stylistically as well. I think that also just comes with growing up ... Everybody finds their own style as they get older, but I also lend a lot of it to the snoot, honestly. The snoot has inspired so much for me."

The proof is in her hits. Her 2023 debut mixtape, *Drowning*, included standouts "Always Been You" and "Pray," both showcasing Murph's storytelling while spotlighting her Southern drawl and emotive rasp. The rest of her year was defined by her collaborations, adding one with Maren Morris titled "Texas" to her lineup.

But as she believes, the best is yet to come. She says her forthcoming debut album is the most proud she has ever felt of her music. "It's just so truly me," she says. "There's some stuff on there that's definitely unexpected ... I'm rapping, I'm belting, and some of it's slightly country. Everything I'm saying on this album, I fucking mean. It's coming straight from the heart."

Her latest single, the eviscerating "Son of a Bitch," is evidence enough. While a bit of Winehouse can be heard in Murph's soulful vocals — though she sings with more grit — the song is distinctly hers. And while rooted in the familiar concept of revenge, much like Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats," Murph's take is more ominous, as she sings, "This side of me, she ain't Jessie."

For an artist like Murph, that kind of authenticity — personally and sonically — is crucial. And while she admits she has had to "overly explain" her vision in some songwriting sessions, she believes her wide-ranging interests are "less of something I'm meticulously doing and more because of who I am."

She recently enlisted Shaboozey to open for her on tour and names Lil Baby as her dream collaborator. She's predicting that "random" team-ups will become increasingly popular this year, expressing her excitement at a potential Lana Del Rey-Quavo release that has been teased online.

And while she has plans of headlining arenas one day (and eventually selling snoots), for now, Murph is enjoying fleeting moments of normalcy before her career kicks into overdrive. Having just performed at Hangout Music Festival, a hometown gig in Alabama's Gulf Shores — she says the difference in crowd size from last year to now "makes me want to cry" — Murph is grounding herself with some family time. She rode bikes with her brother, laid out by the pool with her mom and later planned to watch the Winehouse biopic *Back to Black*.

For Murph, it's more than a movie about one of her icons. It's a reminder of what she herself has long been working toward. "I've always wanted to do this," she says. "It's just surreal."

STYLING BY JOEY THAO. HAIR BY SIENREE. MAKEUP BY BRITTANY PAIGE LAMBERT.

FloyyMenor

AGE 18
LABEL UnitedMasters
PUBLISHER Sony Music Publishing Chile
MANAGEMENT Luis Isaac Arce Cancino

This year, FloyyMenor made history on the Hot Latin Songs chart when his raunchy and viral hit "Gata Only" — a collaboration with Cris MJ — became the first time a Chilean artist entered the list's top 10 in 25 years. Weeks later, the song topped the list, earning both artists their first No. 1. "It has become a global hit, and I'm putting Chile at the top," says FloyyMenor, who only started making music three years ago and whose moniker was inspired by boxer Floyd Mayweather. "I'm very excited about everything that's happening and for people to hear more of my music — there's a lot coming."

d4vd

AGE 19
LABEL Darkroom/Interscope Records
PUBLISHER Sony Music Publishing
MANAGEMENT Mogul Vision

After breaking through with the aching "Romantic Homicide" in 2022, d4vd released his debut EP, *Petals to Thorns*, in May 2023 and quickly followed up with companion EP *The Lost Petals* in September. So far this year, he's keeping the same pace: He has already released four tracks, including the funk-pop "Feel It" for the Amazon Prime Video animated series *Invincible*, which became his third Hot 100 entry in April. It's all part of his plan to maintain momentum as a young artist, he says. "With all the ways music can be discovered, it is easier than ever to gain traction but even harder to sustain a fan base. The quick fame rarely ever turns into a sustainable career."

Ivan Cornejo

AGE 19
LABEL Interscope Records
PUBLISHER Universal Music Publishing Group
MANAGEMENT Pam Cornejo

Cornejo is leading a new generation of regional Mexican hit-makers that has redefined the sound and look of the decades-old genre. The 19-year-old's signature take, powered by electric guitars and deeply emotive lyrics, has gained him a young and fervid fan base that has helped catapult him to the top of the *Billboard* charts and led to two consecutive sold-out U.S. tours. Cornejo says the stateside treks are among his biggest achievements to date, along with his first performance at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo to 72,000 fans in March. And while Cornejo believes his age helps him "relate to my fans ... I understand some of the difficulties of being a young adult," the challenges he faces are age-agnostic: "[I want] to make my fans proud and create songs that are meaningful."

The Kid LAROI

AGE 20
LABEL Columbia Records
PUBLISHER Sony Music Publishing
MANAGEMENT n/a

After he broke through in 2021 with top 10 smashes "Without You" and "Stay" (with Justin Bieber), The Kid LAROI released his long-teased debut studio album, *The First Time*, in November. "It has almost been two and a half years since I last dropped a project and I'm proud to say that this one is SO much better than anything I've ever released," the artist wrote on social media of the album, which featured Future, Jungkook and Central Cee among its guests. Three months later, LAROI brought fans behind the scenes with his Prime Video documentary feature, *Kids Are Growing Up: A Story About a Kid Named LAROI*.

D4VD: NICK WALKER. FLOYYMENOR: IGNACIO CRUZ. LAROI: ADAM KARGENIAN. CORNEJO: OSVALDO ARIAS.

NewJeans

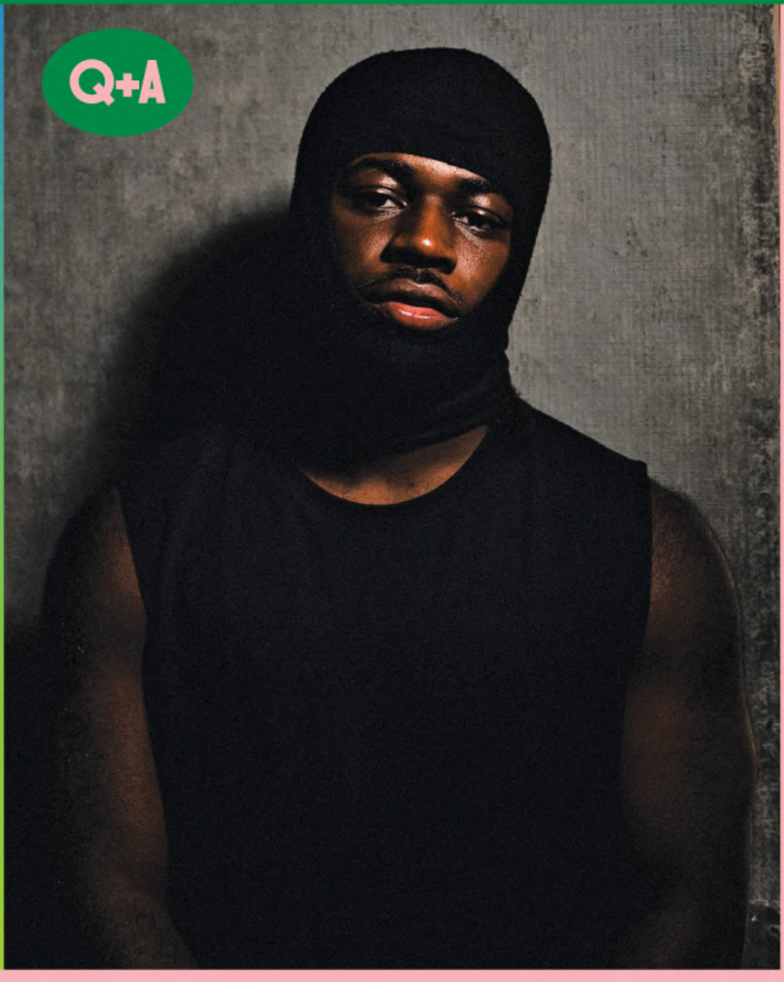
AGE Minji (20), Hanni (19), Danielle (19), Haerin (18), Hyein (16)
LABEL ADOR
PUBLISHER Sony Music Publishing
MANAGEMENT ADOR

NewJeans has established a singular presence in K-pop since debuting just two years ago, scoring three top 10 hits on the Billboard Global 200, four on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. chart, five on the Hot 100 and six on World Digital Song Sales. Its highest among them was the high-energy breakout "Super Shy," from NewJeans' second EP, *Get Up*. Upon release, it bested the *Barbie* soundtrack for No. 1 on the Billboard 200. In February, NewJeans was named *Billboard*'s Women in Music Group of the Year. Hanni credits the group's global rise in part to social media: "It has become easier to reach wider audiences regardless of language or any other type of barriers," she says. "That is something we definitely don't take for granted."

Brenn!

AGE 20
LABEL Darkroom Records/ Westward Recordings
PUBLISHER Sony Music Publishing
MANAGEMENT Fourward Music

After the viral success of "4runner," a folk-pop debut single that fits well within the genre's recent resurgence, Brenn! scored a management deal in 2022 and record deal early last year, joining Darkroom's roster of young talent like superstar Billie Eilish and alternative R&B breakout d4vd. Despite scoring his first smash, assembling such a well-equipped team is what Brenn! feels most proud of so far. "They have helped me keep my head on my shoulders and stay grounded in what I believe in. They have not let any of this define who I am."



4Batz

AGE 20
LABEL n/a
PUBLISHER n/a
MANAGEMENT Milano

In 2023, the black balaclava-donning R&B crooner 4Batz had the internet puzzled over his paradoxical audiovisual aesthetic that contrasted his tender delivery against his tough exterior. After gaining attention online from his feature on *From the Block* — a popular performances series by media platform 4 Shooters Only — during which he performed debut single "act i: stickerz '99'" and viral smash "act ii: date @ 8," Drake hopped on a remix of the latter, earning 4Batz his first Hot 100 top 10 hit and first No. 1 on Hot R&B Songs. In May, the Dallas native self-released his debut mixtape, *u made me a st4r*, which debuted at No. 2 on the Top R&B Albums chart and featured the Ye remix of "act iii: on god? (she like)." 4Batz is up for best new artist at the 2024 BET Awards — his first award nomination. Ahead, he has a bigger goal in mind: "To become the king of R&B."

How does it feel to have put out your first project, *u made me a st4r*?
I showed people that I'm not a one-trick pony. I'm glad people can see a little bit of what I'm capable of, and I can't wait to show them even more.

You've been called an industry plant and accused of being engineered with artificial intelligence. How did you initially react?
I'm starting to get why people are calling me that. I'm the best! That's how I look at it. You have to be doing something very, very special to be called something that's not a human figure. It's so good it can't be true. That's one of the biggest compliments to me.

What are the benefits and challenges of being a young artist in today's music industry?
Either people love you or they hate you, but you got to embrace both of them because they both improve you.

Whose career do you admire most?
Tupac Shakur and DMX because they didn't give a fuck. Their impact on the world was crazy. And they came from the gutter, just how I came from.

NEWJEANS: ADOR. BRENN!: JACOB RUTH. 4BATZ: RALPH CANONO.

Tate McRae

AGE 20
LABEL RCA Records
PUBLISHER
Sony Music Publishing
MANAGEMENT
Full Stop Management

While it's hard to pinpoint just one highlight in McRae's past year — the pop star released her celebrated second album, *Think Later*, and scored her first Hot 100 top 10 hit with "Greedy" (which peaked at No. 3) — her "pinch-me moment" was performing on *Saturday Night Live*. "It was something I've always dreamed of and hoped to do one day, but I could never have imagined it happening this last year." Ahead, her global tour will hit North America in July and includes a date at Madison Square Garden, which she calls "a massive milestone."

You had a stellar 2023. How did you reward yourself?
2023 was a crazy, exciting, life-changing year. I released my album in December 2023, right before the holidays. I was able to take a little break with my family and friends for Christmas and New Year's. I visited my brother at his college and took a little trip to Mexico. It's hard to be away from the studio for a long time, though. The second week of January, I was back in writing again.

How do you measure your success, and what accomplishment are you most proud of so far in your career?
I really try to equate self-happiness with success. While any exciting number or chart [achievement] means so much to me and is absolutely worthy of celebration, I've realized I feel the most successful when I am the most satisfied creatively and feel the most connected to the kind people who listen to my music.

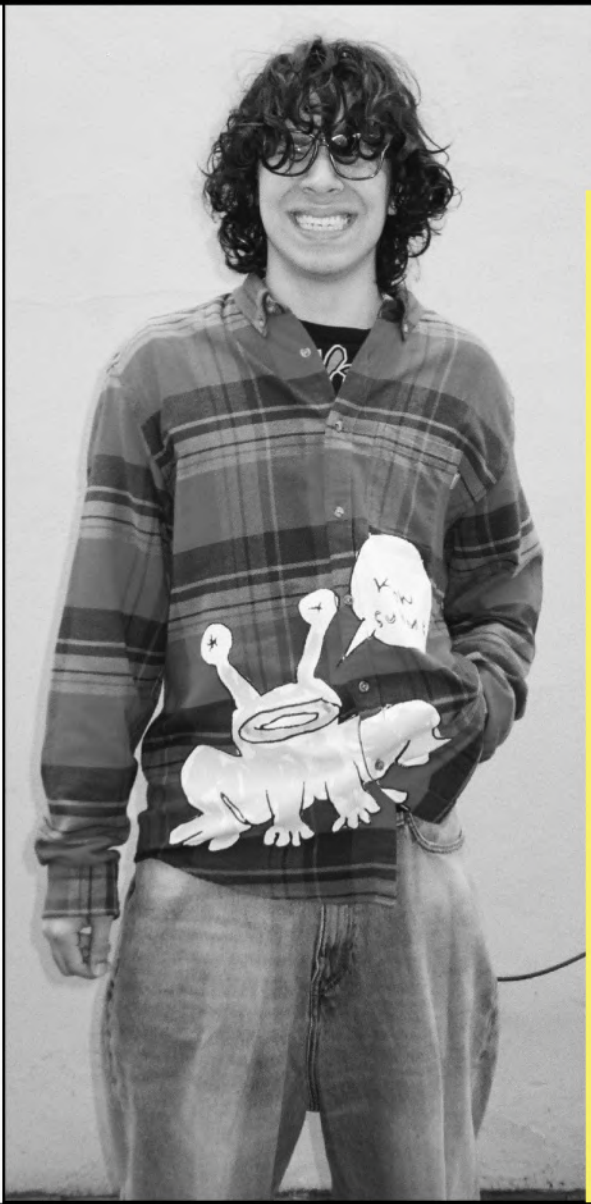
What are the benefits and challenges of being a young artist today?
I feel really grateful to be surrounded by a like-minded group of peers who not only am I such big fans of, but also am so inspired by. I'd say the biggest challenge is the social media and phone aspect of it all — it's difficult for any young person to be exposed to that many people every single day, let alone receiving that many different opinions.

You'll turn 21 this summer. How do you plan to celebrate?
I'm planning on being back in Canada with hometown friends and family for my 21st. I'm not a huge fan of birthdays, so something a bit more low-key. A few days later, I'll play my first hometown show in Calgary, which is wild.

Lay Bankz

AGE 19
LABEL Artist Partner Group
PUBLISHER Artist Partner Group
MANAGEMENT Kenney Blake

Having harnessed the boundless power of TikTok, Bankz is now reaping the reward of a series of small viral moments, as the South Philadelphia artist has tried her hand at genres ranging from Jersey Club to bubblegum pop and R&B. In April, she made her Hot 100 debut with the spunky "Tell Ur Girlfriend," which also entered the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs and Hot Rap Songs charts. "A lot of people underestimate your capabilities when you're young, especially when you're Black and a woman," she says. "I never let it bother me because I'm so focused and determined on what my goal is that no one can mess up what I have planned for myself."



Riovaz

AGE 20
LABEL Darkroom/Geffen
PUBLISHER Word Collections
MANAGEMENT Argenis "Henny" Hernandez

Having grown an online fan base following the 2020 release of his debut EP, alternative artist Riovaz has developed an appreciation for the instant accessibility he and his peers have today. "Everyone will get their opportunity," he says. "Being young and knowing how to use social media to your advantage will work at least once." But he also notes that instant exposure has led to an oversaturated industry, noting, "I don't think *everyone* should be making music." Yet the New Jersey native is continuing to stand out by keeping up a steady release of dance-influenced music this year, with collaborative EP *The Heart Racers* followed by the longing single "I Wonder" in May.

MCRAE: CONOR CUNNINGHAM. BANKZ: PABLO FLORES PEREZ. RIOVAZ: ARGENIS HERNANDEZ.

The Linda Lindas

AGE Bela Salazar (19), Lucia de la Garza (17), Eloise Wong (16), Mila de la Garza (13)
LABEL Epitaph Records
PUBLISHER Warner Chappell Music
MANAGEMENT Fly South Music Group

Since the Los Angeles-formed rock band delivered its debut, *Growing Up*, in 2022, it has followed with a handful of singles and a few covers: Most recently, the group reworked "Found a Job" for a Talking Heads tribute that celebrates its 1984 live album, *Stop Making Sense*. The tracklist features everyone from Miley Cyrus to Paramore, the latter of whom is a prior Linda Lindas collaborator and an act that the band has long admired. Ahead, Lucia teases the release of the band's second album and notes that this year "we'll be touring more than ever." On the road, sister Mila's hope is simple: "To be surrounded by more young artists — it can be difficult to be surrounded by people older than us all the time!"

Chino Pacas

AGE 17
LABEL Street Mob Records/PFL/Geffen Records
PUBLISHER Street Mob Publishing
MANAGEMENT Luis López (Street Mob Records)

When a then-16-year-old Pacas uploaded his original hit "El Gordo Trae el Mando" to TikTok last year, he had no idea what would follow. The viral track not only scored him a record deal — Fuerza Regida's Jesús "JOP" Ortiz Paz signed the Mexican artist to his Street Mob Records — but also his first *Billboard* chart entry. He has since scored two more, with "Dijeron Que No la Iba a Lograr" (featuring Fuerza Regida) and "Que Onda" (with Calle 24 and Fuerza Regida). At the 2023 Billboard Latin Music Awards, Pacas was a finalist for best new artist. "I am very proud of how the fans have received my music," he says, "and of the progress I have made in myself by doing what I love."

GAYLE

AGE 19
LABEL Atlantic Records
PUBLISHER Arthouse Entertainment/UMG
MANAGEMENT Kristina Russo (KR Experiments)

GAYLE's career kicked into high gear with her 2022 Grammy-nominated hit, "abcdefu." The smash sustained her throughout 2023. The rising alt-pop artist snagged an opening slot on Taylor Swift's record-breaking The Eras Tour and contributed a song, "Butterflies," to the *Barbie* soundtrack. "It's hard for me to say I'm proud of myself, but I'm the most proud of the fact that I was associated with such huge cultural moments," GAYLE says. "I really tried to honor who I am and not let any of those things sway my artistry or who I want to be as a person."

Mason Ramsey

AGE 17
LABEL Atlantic Records
PUBLISHER n/a
MANAGEMENT Pete Olson

After selling out a spring tour and performing in Europe for the first time, yodeling sensation Ramsey returned this year with a more mature look and sound that he debuted with the twangy and soulful "Blue Over You," which he released in February. He followed the song with "Something You Can Hold" and has since teased more new music to come. In May, it was announced he would join a star-studded lineup that includes Lainey Wilson, Miranda Lambert and Luke Combs on the anticipated *Twisters* soundtrack.

LINDA LINDAS: JESSIE COWAN. PACAS: JORDAN PÉREZ. GAYLE: ACACIA EVANS. RAMSEY: WORKING HOLIDAY.

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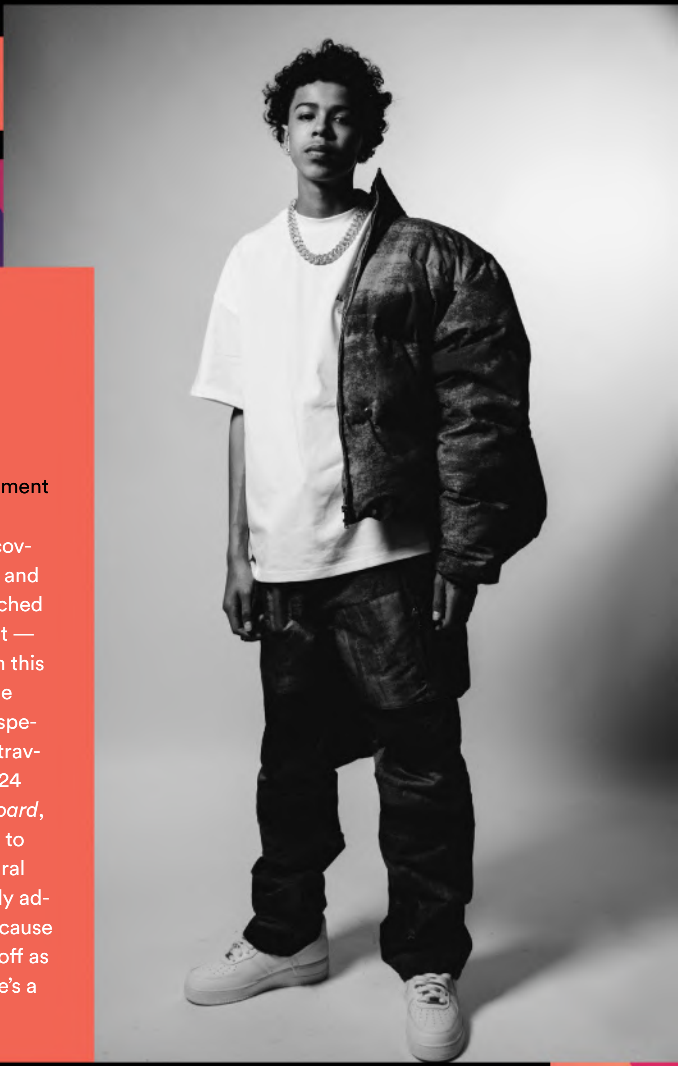

Luh Tyler

AGE 18
LABEL Motion Music/Atlantic Records
PUBLISHER Sony Music Publishing
MANAGEMENT Generation Now Management

After his 2023 breakout with a highly coveted spot on *XXL*'s Freshman Class list and debut mixtape *My Vision* — which reached No. 2 on the Heatseekers Albums chart — Luh Tyler is keeping up the momentum this year. The Florida rapper is enjoying "the fun" of being a young artist, he says, especially when it comes to "doing shows, traveling [and] meeting fans." Named a 2024 R&B/Hip-Hop Artist To Watch by *Billboard*, Luh Tyler is taking the necessary steps to continue his graceful transition from viral star to hip-hop powerhouse. "I probably admire Kodak Black's career the most because he's just like me," he says. "He started off as a young artist from Florida, and now he's a legend on a global level."

Xavi

AGE 20
LABEL Interscope
PUBLISHER Universal Music Publishing Group
MANAGEMENT Razcon Lopez, Natalia Lopez (Smart Music Management)

Newcomer Xavi started 2024 with a resounding debut atop the Hot Latin Songs chart with "La Diabla" followed by a sold-out tour titled Poco a Poco. In May, he scored another No. 1 hit, this time on the Regional Mexican Airplay chart with "Corazón de Piedra." Having now introduced the masses to his twist on regional Mexican music with his *tumbados románticos*, Xavi is hard at work on his highly anticipated debut album — not even taking off for his 20th birthday. "I had a show in El Paso [Texas]," he recalls. "They gave me a crown, it was really special for me. It has rubies like my necklace. [Ruby is the name of] my mom. That was very memorable."

You just finished your first tour. How did it go?
Each show was a lot of energy, a lot of adrenaline and a lot of jumping. You get a little tired, but the truth is, *estaba bien perro* [it was really cool]. It was weird because we were just getting used to it and now we're done. At the beginning, I was overthinking a lot, but I started to like it. I don't get as nervous as I used to.

Whose career do you admire?
I admire Nata [Natanael Cano] a lot. He was the one who introduced me to the genre. I really respect him. He continued to push the genre even when everyone was running the opposite way. He always swam against the current. Even though nobody believed in the genre, Nata didn't stop.

What is one area of the industry that you're excited to explore?
The process of finishing the album. I want to put out an album for the genre [of regional Mexican music] first. I don't want to change style yet until we finish the first album, push it to the max and dedicate myself to *corridos* and regional. The next one, maybe we can evolve, go a little more versatile.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in music?
The best advice is to believe in what you are doing, above anything else. To do it with passion and a lot of love. Nothing can stop you when you have clear goals.

Lauren Spencer-Smith

AGE 20
LABEL Island Records/Republic Records
PUBLISHER Warner Chappell Music
MANAGEMENT Trevor Albair

Since breaking out with her 2022 smash, "Fingers Crossed," which became a top 20 Hot 100 hit, former *American Idol* contestant Spencer-Smith scored a major-label deal with Island and Republic that same year. In 2023, she released her debut album, *Mirror*, that included follow-up hit "Flowers." This year, she was up for three JUNO Awards: album, pop album and artist of the year. She's currently working on her second full-length.

XAVI: LUIS HERNANDEZ. LUH TYLER: CHRIS ALLMEID. SPENCER-SMITH: GIANNI GALLANT.

UNIDOS POR LA MÚSICA

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Unidos Por La Musica was established in 2011 with the intention to help unemployed families, single moms, and students who are underserved. Because of our benefit concerts, we are able to help community members with free programming such as a food bank, DACA scholarships, access to healthcare, and immigration resources.

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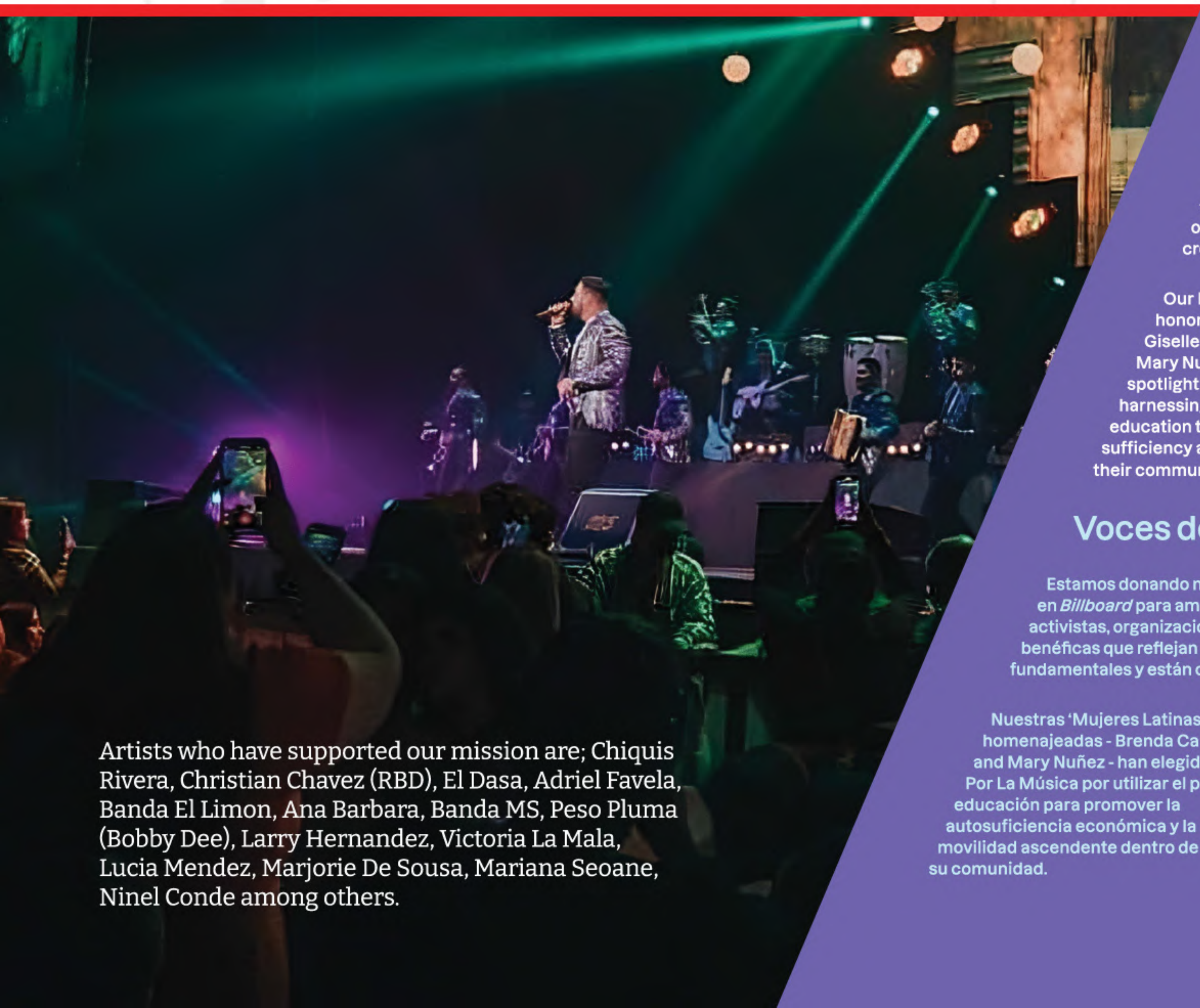

Artists who have supported our mission are; Chiquis Rivera, Christian Chavez (RBD), El Dasa, Adriel Favela, Banda El Limon, Ana Barbara, Banda MS, Peso Pluma (Bobby Dee), Larry Hernandez, Victoria La Mala, Lucia Mendez, Marjorie De Sousa, Mariana Seoane, Ninel Conde among others.

Voices of Change

We're donating our ad space in *Billboard* to amplify voices of activists, organizations, and charities that reflect our core values and are creating real change.

Our Latin Women in Music honorees - Brenda Carrasco, Giselle De Armendi and Mary Nuñez - have chosen to spotlight Unidos Por La Música for harnessing the power of music and education to promote economic self-sufficiency and upward mobility within their community.

Voces del Cambio

Estamos donando nuestro espacio publicitario en *Billboard* para amplificar las voces de activistas, organizaciones e instituciones benéficas que reflejan nuestros valores fundamentales y están creando un cambio real.

Nuestras 'Mujeres Latinas en la Música' homenajeadas - Brenda Carrasco, Giselle De Armendi and Mary Nuñez - han elegido destacar a Unidos Por La Música por utilizar el poder de la música y la educación para promover la autosuficiencia económica y la movilidad ascendente dentro de su comunidad.

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Qing Madi

AGE 17
LABEL Columbia Records/ Bu Vision & Jton Music
PUBLISHER Bu Vision
MANAGEMENT Jton Music

Nigerian singer-songwriter Qing Madi broke out in 2023 with a debut self-titled EP and first U.S. trek (as part of fellow Nigerian artist BNXN's Sincerely BNXNTour) and earned co-signs from Ayra Starr and Wizkid along the way. In May, she tapped Chlöe for a remix of standout track "Vision" that arrived with a self-co-directed music video. And while she credits Kendrick Lamar for shaping her style and music, noting that "he basically taught me how to write" through his songs, she's especially grateful for Burna Boy and Wizkid, both of whom she grew up listening to and who she says are now "pushing the Afrobeats culture [and opening] the doors for me to dream and aspire to be more than my surroundings."

310babii

AGE 18
LABEL HIGH IQ/EMPIRE
PUBLISHER EMPIRE
MANAGEMENT Jentry Salvatore

Last year, 310babii scored a national hit with his West Coast-indebted hip-hop smash "Soak City (Do It)," which spent two weeks atop *Billboard*'s Rhythmic and Rap Airplay charts and earned co-signs from Travis Scott and NBA star Russell Westbrook. "I am proud of how far I have come within a short amount of time both as a person and an artist ... all while still attending high school," he says. The Inglewood, Calif., native is basking in the benefits of his youth: "I have full access to certain resources earlier in my career than artists before me," he says. "Now kids like myself can be heard by recording a song in [our] bedroom and uploading it to an app."

Ángela Aguilar

AGE 20
LABEL Machin Records
PUBLISHER Solitaria Music
MANAGEMENT Machin

Ángela has remained a fixture in the male-dominated genre of regional Mexican music thanks to her take on *ranchera* and mariachi. Part of the Aguilar musical dynasty — her father is Mexican music icon Pepe Aguilar and her legendary grandparents are Antonio Aguilar and Flor Silvestre — Ángela is focused on showcasing the variety of sounds that comprise *música mexicana* with her latest album, *Bolero*, while also inspiring a new generation of musicians. "I'm proud to be a woman in the ranchero/regional Mexican music genre," she says. "Showing the new generations, my generation, classical ranchera/bolero music will always make me proud — you can't know where you're going if you don't know where you come from."

Contributors Rania Aniftos, Kyle Denis, Griselda Flores, Josh Glicksman, Lyndsey Havens, Jason Lipshutz, Heran Mamo, Isabela Raygoza, Jessica Roiz. **Methodology** *Billboard* editors and reporters weighed a variety of factors in determining the 2024 21 Under 21 list, including, but not limited to, impact on consumer behavior, measured by metrics such as album and track sales, streaming volume, social media impressions and radio/TV audiences reached; career trajectory; and overall impact in the industry, specifically during the past 12 months. Unless otherwise noted, Luminate is the source for sales/streaming data.

QING MADI: SIMDY CHUKWUMA. 310BABII: PICO SHAW. AGUILAR: SERGIO VALENZUELA.

Warner Music Latina Congratulates
Giselle de Armendi
&
Brenda Carrasco
For their recognition in
BILLBOARD'S LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC
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MIAMI

Cabello photographed April 30 in Los Angeles.

Styling by Jared Ellner
No Sesso dress, SHAY earrings.

Inspired by the city she calls home, **Camila Cabello** is embracing "big baddie energy"— and making a fearless, full-length creative statement — on her new album, *C,XOXO*

BY JESSICA ROIZ

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERICA HERNÁNDEZ

HEAT

Mugler dress, SHAY earrings and rings.

IT'S A SUNNY MAY AFTERNOON in Miami's lush Coral Gables neighborhood, and Camila Cabello greets me at her family's one-story home accompanied by a small menagerie: four dogs — including her golden retriever, Tarzan, and German shepherd, Thunder — along with her rescued cockatoo, Percy.

Cabello is home "to recharge" amid a hectic few days that included time in California and will soon take her to New York for the Met Gala. But today, with her messy pigtails, Daisy Duke shorts and silver flip-flops, Cabello looks more like a college girl on break than a major pop star about to release her fourth solo album — a fearless artistic statement coming June 28 titled *C,XOXO*. Her father washes the driveway, her mother offers me *cafecito*, and her aunt plays with the dogs.

"Let's go to lunch — I'll drive!" Cabello exclaims as she grabs her tote. The 27-year-old got her license just two years ago and learned to drive during the pandemic; as we hop into her white Tesla — nicknamed "Tessie" — she admits that getting behind the wheel (with a good album or podcast on the stereo) is her favorite form of stress relief. She takes us to Pura Vida, one of her favorite local health spots, where we sit down outside with summer chicken bowls. "Girl, it's this Met Gala coming up... I can't wait to stuff my face after," she jokes.

With her still fairly new platinum blonde tresses (a fresh 'do she debuted on social media in February), Cabello largely goes incognito; some passersby seem to recognize her but are perhaps too shy to approach. Just one screams, "Camila, I love you!" — a reminder that while Cabello might periodically crash at her parents' house, she's still a global superstar. But while she jokes that her new look has the side benefit of granting her some anonymity in public, she explains that it has a deeper meaning.

"The voice that I found with my new album has this big baddie energy vibe," she explains animatedly. "Part of that spirit is taking risks, not giving a fuck and doing whatever you want. I think the blonde was me staying true to that feeling. With the hair, it was like, 'How do I tell people, visually, that this is my new era?' Sometimes you need the physicality to let them know, 'Oh, this is a new thing, a new character.' "

On March 27, Cabello unleashed the first taste of what *C,XOXO* might bring: the Playboi Carti-featuring "I Luv It," co-produced by Spanish hit-maker El Guincho (Rosalía) and Jasper Harris (Jack Harlow, Doja Cat). "I Luv It" samples Gucci Mane ("Lemonade"), interpolates a 2011 Rihanna loosie ("Cockiness [Love It]") — and has a hyperpop aesthetic that marked a significant departure from the more conventional pop (and more recently Latin-influenced) sound that made Cabello a household name, first as a member of Fifth Harmony, then as a solo artist.

The unexpected track was also significant for another reason: It was Cabello's first Interscope Records release after leaving Epic Records, her label home of nearly a decade where she had been since Fifth Harmony's debut and released her first three solo albums — *Camila*, *Romance* and *Familia* — between 2018 and 2022.

Reactions to "I Luv It" on social media were mixed, and the song debuted and peaked at No. 81 on the Billboard Hot 100. Still, the song (and its somewhat unhinged vibes) piqued interest in Cabello's next musical chapter. "The unpredictability of it is so different for me," she says. "It's such a kick-the-door-down moment, sonically, that it makes me feel strong and powerful. At least for me, in this stage of my life, it would feel so unfulfilling to just have a song that was big but felt like something that I've already done before. That brings me no joy. I would rather have a song that's weird and be new territory to me."

While the strangeness of "I Luv It" encapsulates Cabello's new era, it was a different track that truly set the tone for the *C,XOXO* sessions. "At first, we played around with different genres, trying to find the sonic world the album lives in," she explains. " 'Chanel No. 5' really cracked open the album. For me, as a writer, that was the voice I wanted for the album: coy, cheeky and kind of devious."

On "Chanel No. 5," Cabello sings between trippy piano interludes, her falsetto distorted, about being a "cute girl with a sick mind." At one point she even raps — she has recently taken inspiration from "cunty, cocky girl rap" like Flo Milli and Baby Tate, she explains.

"We realized we hit this key transition in the process," says Harris, who co-produced the album, of the track. "That's the first song we knew was very *C,XOXO*, and creating every song forward, we would ask if it felt as true as 'Chanel.' It was our north star." ("Chanel No. 5" will be released pre-album drop as a fan track.)

Cabello, El Guincho and Harris devoted most of 2023 to working on the album — in New York, Los Angeles and the Bahamas but primarily Miami — and along the way, she had another creative epiphany: Her previous sets all had a why, a when and a who at their center, but never a where. *C,XOXO* would: It's a love letter to Miami.

CABELLO WASN'T ALWAYS a Miami girl, but her journey here — a city full of sounds and culture enriched by immigrants — was a big part of what ultimately made her one.

Born in Havana, Cuba, she moved to Mexico City with her parents at age 6 and ultimately arrived in Miami with her mother (her father joined almost two years later). Her mom, who had been an architect in Cuba, worked in the shoe department at Marshalls; her dad washed cars at Dolphin Mall. Today, they run a successful contracting company called Soka Construction (named after Camila and her younger sister, Sofia).

In ninth grade, Cabello auditioned for *The X Factor*, where she eventually joined contestants Ally Brooke, Normani, Lauren Jauregui and Dinah Jane to form Fifth Harmony. With Cabello in the fold, the girl group — one of the most commercially successful ever — went platinum with its first two albums, in 2015 and 2016, and notched a top five Hot 100 hit with the Ty Dolla $ign-featuring "Work From Home."

Amid Fifth Harmony's success, Cabello started exploring opportunities outside the group. In 2015, she teamed with Shawn Mendes for "I Know What You Did Last Summer," which cracked the top 20 of the Hot 100; the following year, she released "Bad Things" with Machine Gun Kelly, which went to No. 4. In December 2016, Fifth Harmony announced Cabello's departure from the group on social media. "After 4 and a half years of being together, we have been informed via her representatives that Camila has decided to leave Fifth Harmony," the other four members stated. "We wish her well."

Cabello quickly flourished on her own: Her first three solo albums all reached the top 10 of the Billboard 200, and she has logged 21 Hot 100 entries as a solo artist, plus picked up two Latin Grammys. All the while, she continued notching star collaborations, like "Hey Ma," an early-2017 teamup with Pitbull and J Balvin from the *Fate of the Furious* soundtrack. But her solo career really took off in August of that year with the Young Thug-featuring "Havana," which climbed to No. 1 on the Hot 100 the following January. Her second Hot 100 chart-topper followed two years later: the steamy duet "Señorita" alongside Mendes, with whom she was in a much-photographed, two-year relationship.

Still, Cabello hasn't yet delivered her lasting, full-length statement — the one that strongly defines her creative ethos and is entirely her own. Her latest album, 2022's *Familia*, scored a top 40 hit with the Ed Sheeran-featuring "Bam Bam," but it was Cabello's lowest-charting solo project. (Her feature film *Cinderella* the previous year — a splashy starring role that could've further boosted her profile — received, at best, middling reviews.) In September 2022, Cabello left Epic to sign with Interscope — home to young stars like Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo, who have become some of the biggest names in pop music by unapologetically establishing strong musical identities. With *C,XOXO*, Cabello is poised to potentially do the same.

"This was the first time she had the chance to decide on her own record label," says Cabello's longtime manager, Roger Gold of Gold Music Management. "[Epic was] wonderful and super supportive, but there's a difference between being signed to a label without your own selection process and making decisions and then really getting to do that for the first time. It was a big deal for her to find people who deeply wanted to work with her, respected her and understood her. [Interscope] truly makes us feel like

we're the only artist on the label sometimes."

"She's the kind of artist who doesn't compromise," says Michelle An, Interscope Geffen A&M president and head of creative strategy. "It sounded like Camila wanted a label team that really gets into the weeds of everything. What are the big looks with the [digital service provider] partners? What is the strategy with radio? How are we implementing it internationally? She's the boss of the boardroom, and she can tell us how she feels and how she wants to market. She's really embracing the fact that she has a big team that operates like a boutique."

That level of label support, Gold says, allowed Cabello to treat *C,XOXO* as the kind of creative departure she had never explored before. "She's feeling very confident in her womanhood, owning her own power," he says, "and feeling like this is her time to bravely say the things she wants to say." It may have been a sonic jolt and, to some fans, an outlier, but "I Luv It" was no red herring.

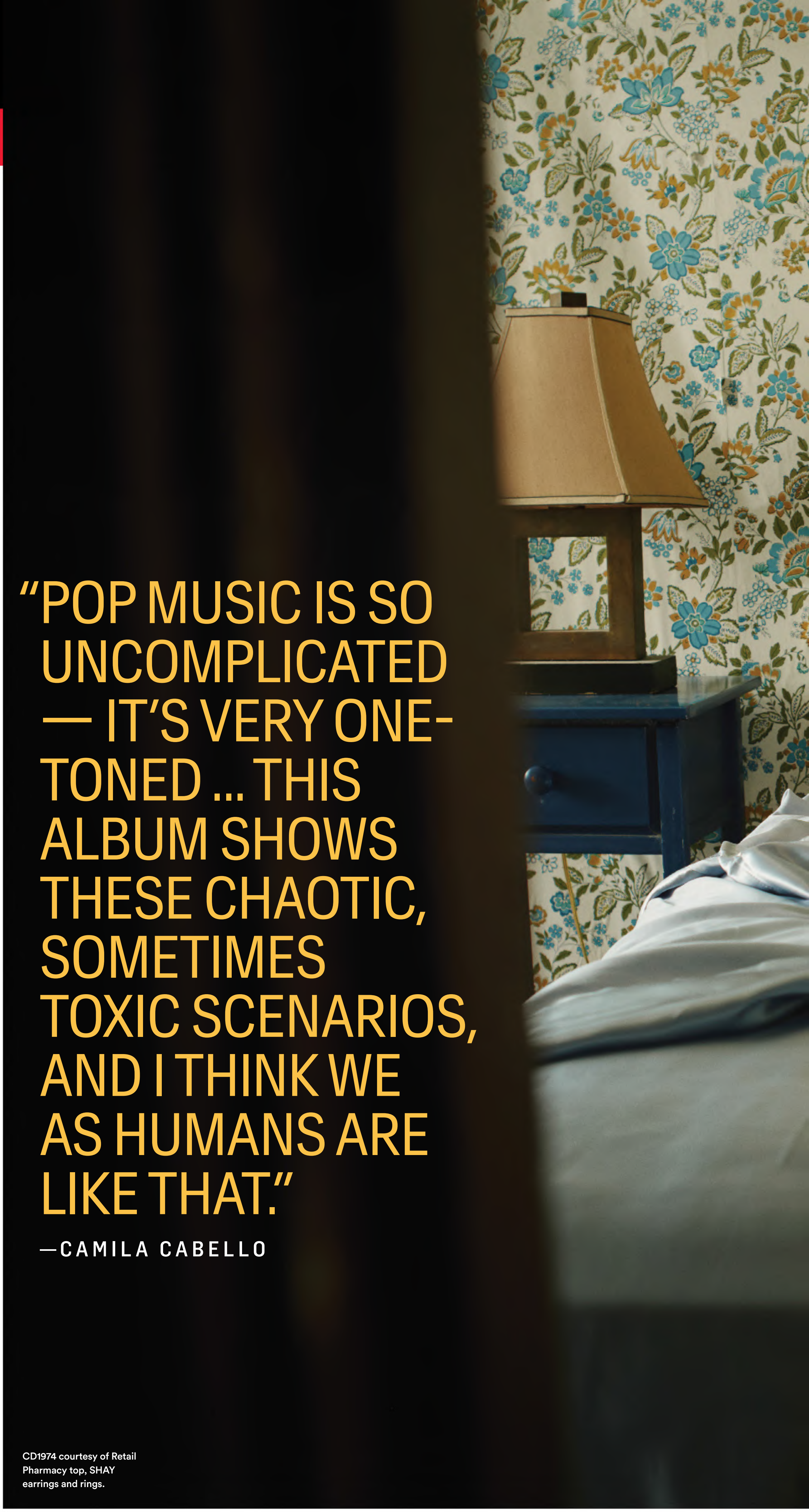
On *C,XOXO*, Cabello's musical hallmarks remain — her hypnotic falsetto, her vulnerable ballads, her heartfelt songwriting — but in an entirely different sonic context that now blends hip-hop, Afrobeats, R&B, reggaetón and electronic music. They're the sounds of Miami itself, vividly evoking the scenes of the city: driving past the clubs on Collins Avenue in Miami Beach or through bustling, artsy Wynwood on a busy weekend.

"So much of the inspiration for this album was driving, listening to music, rolling the windows down and hearing what people in the city are listening to," Cabello says. "The voice she was using as a writer felt very much like the city itself," El Guincho adds. "I thought it was a very interesting angle to have Camila represent her city strongly in a pop album context, which are usually very displaced and decentralized."

Because the album was made almost entirely in Miami, Cabello says she looked at the city "with binoculars and extra-close attention. Sonically, it feels like it's a Miami art piece." For her palette, Cabello drew on a diverse group of collaborators to add unique colors, including Carti, Lil Nas X, The-Dream, fellow Floridians City Girls and BLP Kosher — and, most notably, Drake. That much-discussed (and paparazzi-snapped) jet ski adventure Drake and Cabello took in the Turks and Caicos Islands last year? They were finishing up a track together.

"He's the fucking GOAT, so it felt like shooting for the stars," Cabello recalls of initially approaching the Canadian rapper by sliding into his Instagram DMs. "I showed him the album when I felt comfortable enough and he really liked it. [The feature] came out of a nontransactional place. He had this idea of a song called 'Hot Uptown,' and it just felt like I was in the city. I was in Miami."

The flirtatious, Caribbean-infused track (which until their Turks meetup was, according to Harris, the only album cut created with a remote collaborator) isn't Drake's only



"POP MUSIC IS SO UNCOMPLICATED — IT'S VERY ONE-TONED ... THIS ALBUM SHOWS THESE CHAOTIC, SOMETIMES TOXIC SCENARIOS, AND I THINK WE AS HUMANS ARE LIKE THAT."

—CAMILA CABELLO

CD1974 courtesy of Retail Pharmacy top, SHAY earrings and rings.

C,XOXO appearance. On the nearly two-minute-long interlude "Uuugly," sequenced immediately after "Hot Uptown," he sings over soft synth beats and Cabello's ghostly backing vocals. According to Harris, the interlude was Drake's idea: "He wanted to do one more thing for the album."

"Why does he have his own song? Because selfishly, I just want to hear Drake on my own album," Cabello says with a laugh. "I love that for me — it's like that rebellious mood. Who says I can't do that? It's Drake talking his shit."

"SHE'S FAST, CURIOUS, HAS GREAT INSTINCTS FOR MELODY, IS STRONG WITH HER OPINIONS BUT ALSO OPEN FOR THEM TO BE CHALLENGED. SHE'S PRETTY MUCH A FREESTYLER WITH GREAT FIRST TAKES."

—EL GUINCHO

Another ballsy move for Cabello: This is the first time she has written all her lyrics and lyrical melodies for an album, taking full responsibility for the ideas and concepts behind them. "She's fast, curious, has great instincts for melody, is strong with her opinions but also open for them to be challenged. She's pretty much a freestyler with great first takes," El Guincho says. The producer "really believed in me to take on the writing," Cabello says. "That felt good and important to me. It makes me feel different when the whole body of work is purer, my thoughts and my taste in words. I think that's why it sounds so cohesive, because it really feels like me."

Today, at Pura Vida, Cabello pulls out her phone and opens a Pinterest board she created last fall. It has movie stills from *Spring Breakers*, girls wearing balaclava masks, long manicured nails, BMX bikes, photos of the city at night — all conjuring the quintessential DGAF Miami girl energy that Cabello telegraphs on the cover of *C,XOXO*, which features the sweaty-haired star with heavily mascaraed, just-out-the-club lashes, licking an electric blue lollipop, her tongue stained with its fluorescent color.

"She had specific memories of Miami and growing up there," An says. "She described driving through the tunnels, with [their] very specific yellow lighting that you don't see anywhere else. She described a specific hue of blue at the beaches and was focused on blue hour. The blonde hair was also a big deal. The party culture. She spent a lot of time trying to get us to understand the visual world of Miami."

As she honed the album's voice and vision, Cabello started dressing differently, always wearing lip gloss, fully embracing her bold new persona. "It was important for me on this album to feel that way," she explains. "Pop music is so uncomplicated — it's very one-toned. In a weird way, this album shows these chaotic, sometimes toxic scenarios, and I think we as humans are like that — we're messy, complicated, super twisted."

"There's a lot of people that want you to be formulaic in this business," Gold says. "There's pressure in general to not rock the boat too much: If something isn't broken, don't fix it. Camila is not that type of artist."

WITH *C,XOXO* finished, Cabello has some time to unwind and focus on herself. She finally started watching *Breaking Bad*; she's currently into cold plunges; and she's maximizing the time that she spends in *chancletas* (flip-flops).

"It's when I feel the freest. I just want my toes to be free," she confesses with a smirk. "I hate heels, I hate sneakers, I just want to be in chancletas all the time. This is actually the first time that I've gone to an interview in chancletas, and I feel that this album has given me the permission to do that."

C,XOXO also allowed her to embrace her personal relationships. Simply being able to hang out with her friends at home enriched the creative process, she says: "That energy of being with your friends and that girl gang vibe felt so sick to me."

That vibe particularly comes through on "Dade County Dreaming," the final track she recorded for *C,XOXO*. Inspired by its namesake county, the collaboration with Miami hip-hop duo City Girls (who Cabello connected with through her sound engineer) captures the essence of both the album and who Cabello is today: a city girl herself, having fun and living life. The hard-hitting track — with its '90s freestyle undertones, haunting piano lines and geographic name drops — was, Cabello says, "the missing piece on the album [because] City Girls represent Miami so hard."

Just weeks ahead of releasing *C,XOXO*, Cabello tells me she doesn't have any expectations. "Many things can happen, and they are out of my control," she says. But she's ready to face the feedback with the clarity and maturity she has cultivated in the 12 years since her Fifth Harmony debut.

"[When I was starting out], I wish I knew that not everybody is going to like me, and it has nothing to do with me," she admits. "That affected me a lot in the beginning. When you're that young all you want is acceptance and love, and you can't understand when people don't like you. You take it so personally, and it makes you feel like you're doing something wrong. Once you get older, you realize that people's reactions have nothing to do with you, and you don't have to take it so personally and be affected by it. I'm way more at peace with it today."

On an ordinary day, she'll go to the beach, read a book, invite her friends to her condo in Sunny Isles for dinner, sip a Bacardi and sparkling water, put on a cute outfit and go dancing at Swan, a chic Euro-style spot in the luxurious Miami Design District, or Dirty Rabbit, an edgy Wynwood dance club. After a night out, she'll make a mandatory stop at the 24-hour Pinecrest Bakery for some *croquetas*. Even if she's tired, she pushes herself to go out and won't hold back from dancing with a cute guy if she feels a vibe. "I'm living the *Sex and the City* life, but Miami," she says with a laugh. But really, it's the *C,XOXO* life.

"To me, it's about going out more, going to more parties and just being a bit more fearless and rebellious," she muses. "Before, I would go out and not care about what I looked like. If I felt kind of ugly, it was whatever — but now, I always want to feel pretty for myself. It's about really enjoying life, and I always think to myself, that's what sensuality is all about. It's a sensory thing: enjoying the food you eat, enjoying putting on a few outfits in the mirror, enjoying the senses of being alive. It's about taking in that baddie energy." b

billboard MUJERES LATINAS EN LA MÚSICA

***Cabello** will receive the Global Impact award at **Billboard's Latin Women in Music**, produced by and airing on Telemundo on June 9.*

HAIR BY JESUS GUERRERO AT THE WALL GROUP. MAKEUP BY ASH HOLM AT THE WALL GROUP. MANICURE BY TOM BACHIK AT A-FRAME AGENCY.

Gucci jacket, SHAY earrings,
Harlot Hands rings.

CAN

COKE CRACK THE CHARTS?

Fifty years ago, a Coca-Cola jingle proclaimed "I'd like to buy the world a Coke." Now the iconic brand is finding new ways to reach (and expand) its global audience — releasing original songs by some of music's biggest stars

BY KATIE BAIN

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT CHASE

IN 1971, A FEW hundred young people from around the world stood on a verdant hilltop in Italy and sang about their collective desire to "buy the world a Coke." This now iconic Coca-Cola commercial became a hallmark moment in advertising history and a bona fide hit: A version of "I'd Like To Teach the World To Sing (In Perfect Harmony)" by British pop group The New Seekers reached No. 7 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1972.

Half a century later, Coca-Cola has its eyes on the charts again, but with a very different strategy: through music created by superstar artists in collaboration with Coke itself; promoted and distributed by those artists' labels; and supported by label partner Universal Music Group (UMG), which will assist with promotional and playlist strategy. On a recent day in Seoul, for instance, K-pop sensation NewJeans recorded R&B-infused pop track "How Sweet," sung in English and Korean, which arrived May 24 as both the lead 2024 Coke Studio song and the title track to the act's latest mini-album.

The girl group is just one example of the global stars Coke has signed to its roster. Colombian phenomenon Karol G is working with the brand, and internationally in-demand electronic producer Peggy Gou has created a club banger with, as Coke puts it, a "timeless beat" that "will cross borders and genres." Coke will roll out two more original songs in 2024, with all three 2024 Coke Studio artists (plus another two still to be announced) taking part in Coke Studio-sponsored music festival experiences and yet-to-be-revealed live performances. Coke Studio is also the first client of AUX, Spotify's in-house music advisory agency for brands.

If the songs take off, Coke Studio will, as it has historically, boost visibility and streaming royalties for the artists involved, as well as further expand Coke's own customer base and worldwide soda sales. Coke Studio is Coca-Cola's biggest global music program of 2024, with the songs from each involved artist set to be used in the brand's marketing in more than 150 countries — roughly 75% of the world.

This new phase of Coke Studio arrives at a moment when Coca-Cola is eager to expand its dominance of the carbonated soft-drink industry, a realm in which it has had "over 50% market share on a global basis for a very long time," says Filippo Falorni, director and equity research analyst at Citi, where he tracks the beverage sector. The company reported $45.8 billion in net revenue for 2023 and a 3% net revenue growth in first-quarter 2024. Year to date (and as of press time), its stock price has risen from $59.82 to $62.

At the same time, its biggest rival, PepsiCo, is in the midst of cost-saving initiatives as it attempts to increase profit margins on the beverage side of its business (the company also owns Frito-Lay), which Falorni says have dipped in recent years. "Pepsi went through a period where they were almost deemphasizing the carbonated soft-drink business because they were focusing on [healthier] brands," he says, "and that ultimately hurt the brand."

As part of its belt-tightening, PepsiCo ended its contract as Super Bowl halftime show sponsor in 2022; its remaining music initiatives include its sponsorship of the National Battle of the Bands competition for marching bands from historically Black colleges and universities and its partnership with Mary J. Blige for May's three-day Strength of a Woman Festival and Summit in New York. (Asked how Coke's efforts compare with its direct competitors, Josh Burke, global head of music and culture marketing at the Coca-Cola Company, demurs: "We prefer to focus on what we're doing versus on what our competitors are doing.")

As Falorni explains, the respective companies' business models directly influence their marketing strategies. While PepsiCo owns the bottling companies that produce Pepsi beverages, Coca-Cola sells the syrup that Coke products are made from to a global network of franchised bottlers, allowing Coca-Cola to "leave the execution of the lower-margin business to their bottlers and focus on marketing, which is what they're best at," Falorni says, citing campaigns throughout the company's history that have framed its products as "refreshing, enjoyable and shareable" and created "strong brand equity."

While it's difficult to quantify the direct impact of Coca-Cola's music-related marketing on sales (a representative for Coca-Cola did not respond to questions on the matter), Falorni says music-driven projects like Coke Studio "make the brand very relevant to consumers" — particularly young ones whom, he notes, soda brands in general are having a harder time reaching, given that the demographic is more health-conscious than previous generations. But the internationally popular, of-the-moment artists creating the music that powers

Coke Studio's 2024 artists are (clockwise from left) Karol G, Gou and NewJeans, with two more to be announced.

Coke Studio — with the brand's spirit of uplifting inclusivity in mind — is helping to attract that younger demo to Coca-Cola. This formula differentiates the initiative from how "other brands or even our competitors have been approaching music," Burke says.

"When brands work with music, it's typically very traditional," he continues. "You license a song for a commercial or might have an artist smile and take a picture for Instagram. That's effective and is something we do in our normal marketing, but when we're working with music, we're looking at our role in being authentic and connected to output and storytelling that's going to contribute back to the music community versus just renting from the music industry. It's very important for us that we're adding value back into the ecosystem of music and fandom versus just borrowing from it."

"COKE STUDIO HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING US TAP INTO NEW LANGUAGES AND CULTURES ... THIS PARTNERSHIP HAS OPENED DOORS TO NEW MARKETS THAT WOULD HAVE OTHERWISE TAKEN LONGER TO REACH."

—SONALI SINGH, BUSINESS MANAGER

COKE STUDIO began in Brazil in 2007 as a musical variety show of the same name featuring performances by local artists. While it didn't produce strong results in its first year, its 2008 launch in Pakistan became a phenomenon. There, the project took the form of a TV show called *Coke Studio*. Coca-Cola's creative team recognized cultural tensions between younger and older Pakistanis and based their concept on bridging generations. "Whenever there's such a tension, we try to find vehicles to tell a point of view [on it] from the brand perspective," Coca-Cola global vp of creative Islam ElDessouky says. "Coca-Cola has always been a connector. We're always inclusive and trying to bring people together."

Coca-Cola's team decided to center its Pakistan initiative on music, a format that ElDessouky says the team predicted would make "the point of view of the brand extremely evident." *Coke Studio Pakistan* went to market as a TV musical variety show featuring Pakistani talents performing music in traditional regional styles — *qawwali*, *ghazal*, bhangra — along with hip-hop, rock and pop. Now in its 15th season there, *Coke Studio* has produced over 260 original songs in Pakistan and has over 5 billion streams on its YouTube channel alone. "Pasoori," the 2022 *Coke Studio* collaboration from Pakistani American singer Ali Sethi and Pakistani vocalist Shae Gill, is now Spotify's most streamed Pakistani song of all time, and in 2021, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged *Coke Studio* for its "subtle forces of cultural diplomacy."

Following its success in Pakistan, *Coke Studio* expanded to India in 2011, African territories in 2013, the Philippines in 2017 and Bangladesh in 2022. These projects were also filmed as variety shows featuring local artists performing traditional and original music. In 2022, *Coke Studio* expanded from these regional-market initiatives into a global program.

This push was marked by a project called "The Conductor," a song and music video featuring seven rising acts, including Nigerian star Tems and American R&B artist Ari Lennox, performing a collaborative cover of Queen's 1986 hit "A Kind of Magic." Each artist recorded their own version of the song; those were then all combined — along with a live orchestra and a Freddie Mercury sample — into a two-minute video in which all seven artists performed parts of the song in their respective styles. The clip has 14 million YouTube views, and its top comment serves as proof of concept: "When the ads are so good you actually search for them."

In 2023, Coke Studio signed 16 acts from around the world — Jon Batiste, Sam Smith and Imagine Dragons among them — to the program, pairing acts that lived far from one another for original collaborations. One such duo was Colombian singer-songwriter Camilo and Indian artist Diljit Dosanjh. Sung in Spanish and Punjabi, their song, "Palpita," has 19.5 million global on-demand streams, according to Luminate.

Coca-Cola measures this music's success by how it resonates with fans and through data on streaming and fan engagement, particularly in countries where the artist in question didn't previously have a huge presence. "Coke Studio has been instrumental in helping us tap into new languages and cultures, particularly with our recent collaboration with Camilo," says Dosanjh's business manager, Sonali Singh. "This partnership has opened the doors to new markets that would have otherwise taken longer to reach." Singh says Dosanjh's three Coke

KAROL G, NEWJEANS: CHRISTOPHER POLK FOR BILLBOARD. GOU: DANIELE VENTURELLI/WIREIMAGE.

Studio collaborations over the last 10 years have helped him ascend to playing arenas and stadiums in North America and making his Coachella debut last year.

As the music industry at large now contemplates how to unlock the market power of superfans and fan armies, Coke Studio's latest iteration is focused on exactly that — "especially given that Gen Z acts are more global and connected than previous generations," ElDessouky says.

For Coke Studio, the goal is to tap into the attention (and spending power) of each artist's fan base by giving them new music associated with Coke, a strategy ElDessouky calls a "value exchange that will result in loyalty and love associated with Coca-Cola." Curating this latest group of artists "wasn't necessarily about how many Instagram followers they have or how many monthly listeners they have on Spotify," Burke says. "It was [finding] artists that have a high engagement and special connection with their fans" — particularly a "certain type of warmth or care."

While the Coca-Cola team chose regional-market Coke Studio artists by first listening to their music without knowing who they were (to help identify "that 'it' factor," Burke says), getting artists to sign on for this latest season was easy and a matter of simply reaching out. Burke says that while many artist teams inquire about involvement, this year, the team knew who it wanted to involve and sent the invites.

It also deliberately chose artists with "a footprint across the world," ElDessouky says — such as K-pop act NewJeans; Berlin-based Gou, who represents both her native South Korea and the European electronic scene; and Karol G, the world's biggest female Latin artist. (The pair of forthcoming artist announcements will expand the footprint of Coke Studio's 2024 season to the United States and Africa.)

ElDessouky says the biggest incentive Coke Studio can offer artists is, well, Coca-Cola: "The brand itself has this magic and charm." Plus, Coke Studio delivers artists and their work to audiences in 150 countries, including places where the act may not yet have a strong presence.

While the team declines to share Coca-Cola's overall investment in Coke Studio, ElDessouky says the 2024 budget is spread across departments and that its total number is "not extravagant, because we are very much a conscious company in how we spend our money. But it's not nothing either, because everybody needs to be successful and make gains off their services." Still, Burke emphasizes that Coke Studio "is not just a paycheck or advertising partner" for artists. "We want to be looked at as a partner that can actually help propel the artist's career."

After the 2024 deals were signed, the artists got to work in their own studios. (Coke Studio doesn't have physical locations.) Burke says while there's minimal back-and-forth in terms of song approval, the brief is for artists to make music that ticks Coke Studio's boxes — uplifting, inclusive and without explicit content — while staying true to their respective styles. "Peggy Gou, for example, made a banger," Burke says. "She made a song that no matter where you are in the world or what time of day it is, you're going to want to dance."

Given this remit, Coca-Cola also encourages artists to be collaborative. For instance, Gou came up with ideas on how to tease her music and how she wants to appear on social media. "We love that," ElDessouky says. "If we were able to just do things on our own as a brand, why would we collaborate with artists?"

CORPORATIONS AND musicians partner frequently; still, Coca-Cola's model of developing and underwriting music by internationally famous names is unique. While Pepsi has had stars like Michael Jackson, Ray Charles, Madonna and Britney Spears appear in commercials over the years, all of these ads used either preexisting music from an artist's catalog or original songs directly referencing the brand — an approach Coca-Cola also tried in 2021 when it had Tyler, The Creator write and perform "Tell Me How" for a campaign.

But while any company can "write a check and get an artist to do something," Burke says, Coke Studio has more closely resembled a record label. The music is released through UMG, where Burke previously was vp of marketing and enterprise partnerships at the label's London office. (Like him, several members of the Coke Studio creative team have a music industry background.)

While roughly 50% of the artists who have participated in Coke Studio are UMG acts, being signed to the label isn't a requirement. (Karol G is signed to Interscope Records/UMG, while NewJeans and Gou are signed to ADOR and XL Recordings, respectively.) Coke Studio has retained an ownership share of the more than 40 songs made for its previous global initiatives but will not own the rights to or participate in any royalties from the music made for this year's project.

Released "as if it was any other single from these artists," Burke says, music created through the initiative appears on Coke Studio's channels along with the artists' own platforms. The partnership also includes social media activations and performances. The Coke Studio program is developed in collaboration with the marketing teams in the company's many global markets, with content distributed for local use — like billboards in Japan featuring Karol G.

Coke Studio also partnered with Spotify, which has a dedicated recording studio in its Los Angeles office for emerging artists curated in partnership with Spotify and not limited to Coke Studio-affiliated acts. Spotify, through AUX, will produce live events in partnership with Coke Studio for NewJeans, Karol G, Gou and the two artists yet to be revealed upon the release of their songs. Coke Studio has activations at more than 60 international music festivals including Belgium's Tomorrowland and Coachella in the United States (where, this year, attendees could digitally insert themselves into music videos — and also just hang out in the air-conditioning).

Coca-Cola will hold the 14th annual edition of its own festival, the Coca-Cola Music Experience, in September in Madrid. (A Coke representative says the company can't confirm if 2024 Coke Studio artists will appear.) Fan participation also occurs through bottles of Coca-Cola, with QR codes on the packaging unlocking access to concert tickets, music, videos and more.

As the industry increasingly focuses on "glocalization," which considers strategy from both local and global perspectives, Coke Studio is a way for artists with specific points of view to leverage the brand's ubiquity in a manner that transcends traditional advertising and is arguably more authentic then just singing a jingle. A Coca-Cola representative says the company sells over 1 billion servings of Coca-Cola a day, offering unprecedented crossover potential for the artists involved.

For Coca-Cola, the possibility of reaching the fans of its chosen artists provides this same opportunity. But at a time when it's harder than ever to cut through the noise, Coke will face plenty of competition trying to bubble its new tunes up the charts.

The Coke Studio x Spotify studio space in the latter's Los Angeles office offers emerging talent access to equipment and facilities.

COURTESY OF THE COCA-COLA COMPANY

40 UNDER 40

CULTURE-SHIFTING LABEL PROS, ENTERPRISING MANAGERS, EXECUTIVES ON TECH'S CUTTING EDGE AND MORE HIGHLIGHT *BILLBOARD*'S ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE MUSIC BUSINESS' YOUNG LEADERS

Arnold (left) and Post Malone photographed April 16 in Los Angeles.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL TYRONE DELANEY

Tyler Arnold

President
MERCURY RECORDS

WHEN REPUBLIC RECORDS offered Tyler Arnold a full-time assistant role five months into his six-month internship with the label in 2014, taking it was "a no-brainer" — even if it meant dropping out of Northeastern University one year before graduating. "This is my dream," Arnold recalls thinking. "I have to go for it."

Arnold quickly became an A&R executive extraordinaire: His first signing to the label, in 2015, was a young Post Malone ("I signed him on my 23rd birthday," Arnold recalls); his second was superproducer Metro Boomin in late 2016. By 2020, Arnold was Republic's executive vp of A&R. "I really loved discovering music in high school and college, finding new artists and seeing them grow," he says. "I also wanted to work really closely with the artists, and I felt like A&R, if you do it right, there's such a personal connection that you can build."

Today, the fast-rising executive is applying that same mentality as president of Mercury Records, the Republic division that relaunched in April 2022 with major names like Post and Noah Kahan and strategic partnerships with Big Loud (Morgan Wallen) and Imperial Music (Bo Burnham). And though Arnold says he wasn't sure he was ready to head a label, "I wanted to grow as an executive." (Along with Republic co-founders Monte and Avery Lipman, Arnold credits Big Loud partner/CEO Seth England for encouraging him to take his current role.)

Given Republic's existing infrastructure, Arnold, 31, says he didn't have to worry as much about key departments like radio, commerce and international. As a result, he and GM Ben Adelson (a fellow Republic vet) had runway to try something new. "I asked a lot of my artists what they felt was missing, or I asked managers who had artists at other labels, and tried to create solutions to what the modern record label might look like," Arnold says. "We really dove into creating a label that is fully led by A&R, creative and marketing."

In just two years, Mercury has become an undeniable force. In its first year alone, the label scored a major success with Kahan's *Stick Season*; the album's extended deluxe version, *Stick Season (Forever)*, featured artists including Kacey Musgraves, Hozier and Post. By the end of 2023, Kahan had secured a best new artist Grammy nomination. Meanwhile, Wallen's 2023 album, *One Thing at a Time*, finished as the No. 1 year-end Billboard 200 album; in March, Big Loud announced a multiyear distribution deal with Mercury Records/Republic for all releases, including artists like HARDY and ERNEST.

As for Post, the star has already released a pair of projects on Mercury (2022's *twelve carat toothache* and 2023's *Austin*) and is teasing a third on the way — a country album. In April, he made his Stagecoach debut, performing a set of country covers, and the following night, he joined headliner Wallen to unveil their much-anticipated duet, "I Had Some Help"; the song debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 upon its May release, marking Post's sixth topper on the chart (and Wallen's second). (The single is the latest in an impressive 2024 collaborative run for Post, who has already appeared on Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* and Taylor Swift's *The Tortured Poets Department*; the latter's "Fortnight" scored him another Hot 100 No. 1.) "It has been a dream of mine for Post and Morgan to work together for years," Arnold says, "and to see that come to fruition, it was truly a goose bumps moment.

"When we make a commitment to an artist, we're hoping we work with them for the next 10 to 15 years and beyond," he continues. "That's the goal for us. It's not knocking off hit songs. It's building real careers."

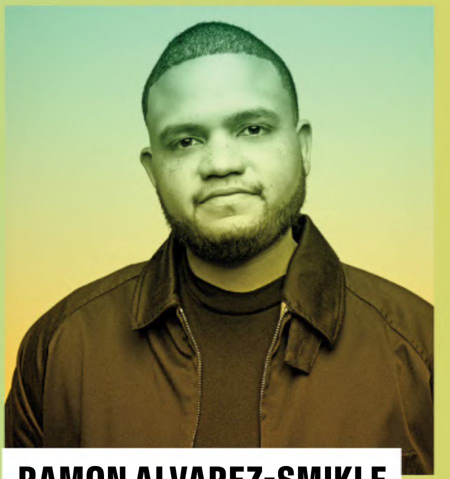
It's also building lifelong bonds: Post welcomed his daughter two years ago, and Arnold recently became a first-time father. "We swap photos and videos and we definitely talk about it," Arnold says. "My relationship with [Post] is one of the most special things I've gotten out of my career, just because of how far we've come and how close we still are — and continue to get. I think it's rare to have that continuity.

"At the end of the day, I'm still an A&R," he adds. "It reflects how we want to build Mercury. We've been lucky to work with some of the biggest and most influential artists over the last decade across all genres, and we want to extend that. [This role] allows me to still be a kid in a candy store, but also have more autonomy." —LYNDSEY HAVENS

RAYMOND ACOSTA

Head of talent management
HABIBI MANAGEMENT

Acosta oversees Habibi, the management company representing clients including Karol G, Grupo Frontera, Eladio Carrión, Mora and Lyanno. "My main daily goal is to identify each artist's DNA so we can strategize properly," says Acosta, 39. Habibi guided Karol G's banner 2023, which included a sold-out stadium tour and her historic Grammy-winning, chart-topping album, *Mañana Será Bonito*. Says Acosta: "We are paving the way for future Latin artists who will no longer need to compromise their cultural identity to break through in this industry and reach the top."
My favorite piece of merch I own is "Karol G's collab with Crocs. The Mega Crush Crocs are iconic."



RAMON ALVAREZ-SMIKLE

Executive vp/head of digital marketing
INTERSCOPE RECORDS

For Alvarez-Smikle, who oversees digital marketing for Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, Playboi Carti, Juice WRLD, JID and the rest of Interscope Geffen A&M's hip-hop and R&B roster, understanding today's niche online communities is essential. "Authentic content and storytelling has always been so important, and I'm excited that it's once again in the forefront of the digital conversation," the 33-year-old executive says. "I'm also incredibly excited by the amount of thought being put into fan spaces and unique communities online for fans to gather around common interests."
The best advice I've received is " 'Luck is opportunity meets preparedness.' One of my music business professors at Columbia College Chicago told me that."

NICHOLAS AYOUB

Director of digital marketing
MESSINA TOURING GROUP

Ayoub has handled digital marketing for massive recent tours, including The Lumineers, Shawn Mendes and Taylor Swift, whose The Eras Tour, *Billboard* estimates, earned over $900 million in 2023. The 29-year-old also led digital strategy for Ed Sheeran's Mathematics Tour, which has sold nearly 6 million tickets since its 2022 launch. He hopes the industry addresses equitable ticketing soon and that legislation will "help get tickets into the hands of fans with less stress [and] confusion and at a fair, transparent value."
My favorite piece of merch I own is "An Ed Sheeran shirt I bought in 2011. It'll always be a reminder of where I started and why I do what I do."

GLENNE AZOFF

Director of artist services
APPLE MUSIC

"It's such a challenging time to be an artist," says Azoff, who with Apple's tools helps artists "cut through" and reach their audiences. As Apple Music's director of artist services, Azoff — the daughter-in-law of legendary music mogul Irving Azoff — also works with the likes of Rihanna and Usher and their teams to strategize "major music milestones" like the Apple Music Super Bowl Halftime Show. "From building out new music campaigns to planning major [events], we're there, collaborating closely with artists and their teams to bring valuable partnerships to life across the Apple ecosystem," the 34-year-old says.
Ten years ago, I was "Working at CAA, considering a job offer to go 'do music' at a startup in Venice [Calif.] called Snapchat."

NICK BRAL

Senior vp of creative
SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Promoted to senior vp of creative in 2024 after nearly a decade at Sony Music Publishing, Bral identifies, signs and advocates for the publisher's talent — and helps its writers "build an annuity that will pay them for many years to come." Bral, 33, is particularly proud that SMP, with its roster including Noah Kahan, Dan Nigro (Olivia Rodrigo) and Rob Bisel (SZA), represented writers in every Big Four category at the 2024 Grammys.
My favorite piece of merch I own is "My *By the Way*-era Red Hot Chili Peppers T-shirt. RHCP were some of my first musical heroes and helped lead me down the path to where I am today."

CALLENDER

Senior vp
WASSERMAN MUSIC

With his clients — who include Jack Harlow, Brent Faiyaz, PJ Morton, Jpegmafia and FERG — the 39-year-old Callender (who professionally only goes by his surname) aims to "bring their music to life, foster long-term careers and forge meaningful connections with fans." Take Harlow, who sold out arenas nationwide in 2022 and scored his third Hot 100 No. 1 in 2023 but continued to honor his Kentucky roots with five sold-out arena shows last year in the state and his inaugural Gazebo Festival, which debuted in Louisville in May.
If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "A guidance counselor helping kids to see their full potential and be excited for all of the amazing possibilities the future can hold."

ACOSTA: RYZE. ALVAREZ-SMIKLE: TRAVIS SHINN. AYOUB: COURTESY OF MESSINA TOURING. AZOFF: APPLE MUSIC. BRAL: JUSTIN BETTMAN. CALLENDER: COURTESY OF CALLENDER.

TARIQ CHERIF

Co-founder/co-CEO
ROLLING LOUD
Founder/CEO
TC MUSIC

Since its 2015 inception, Rolling Loud has grown from buzzy Miami festival into global hip-hop powerhouse, launching new iterations of its multiday rap event in Portugal, Australia, Thailand and beyond. "My core mission is to bring happiness to millions of people worldwide while promoting hip-hop culture," says Cherif, 34. Apart from running Rolling Loud alongside co-founder Matt Zingler, Cherif also launched the label TC Music. He's committed to making the industry more equitable as a member of the Black Music Action Coalition's Executive Leadership Council.

Ten years ago, I was "A young concert promoter, five years deep in the game, figuring out how to scale my business."

DAN CHERTOFF

Senior vp of A&R
RCA RECORDS

Chertoff's diverse RCA roster includes The Red Clay Strays, singer-songwriter Alex G (signed by the 38-year-old executive in January) and breakout country star Tyler Childers, whom Chertoff signed in 2019 and who enjoyed a pivotal 2023 with his album *Rustin' in the Rain*, which scored five Grammy nods and yielded the breakout country star's Hot 100 debut, "In Your Love." "You wake up and go to sleep thinking about your artists and what needs to be accomplished for them each day to help them achieve their goals," Chertoff says.

Ten years ago, I was "Working my first career A&R gig at Canvasback/Atlantic Records, where I signed my first artist: the band alt-J."

TOM CLEES

Senior vp of federal public policy
RIAA

The political strategist and Washington, D.C., lobbyist straddles the disparate worlds of recording studios and Capitol Hill — and explains to policymakers "how government actions affect day-to-day life for artists and industry workers," he says. As artificial intelligence (AI) proliferates, Clees, 35, is attempting to put guard rails in place, including through his work on the No AI Fraud Act, which was introduced in January. "It is always thrilling and humbling to see an idea you helped to craft be debated on Capitol Hill," Clees says, calling the bill "something that is going to matter for a long time."

My favorite piece of merch I own is "A signed Andrew W.K. poster on my wall that says, 'Music is worth living for.' "

Lillia Parsa

President
CAPITOL MUSIC GROUP

ACROSS LILLIA PARSA'S six-year A&R run at Universal Music Publishing Group, where she rose to senior vp of A&R, her impressive achievements included discovering songwriting phenom Nija Charles and developing writer-producers Blake Slatkin and Omer Fedi into the top hit-makers they are today. "I never really thought about leaving publishing and going to the label side," the 31-year-old says. "I loved it, and I was super proud of being a publisher."

But others at UMPG's parent company, Universal Music Group, had noticed Parsa's accomplishments — and amid UMG's recent restructuring, Interscope Records CEO John Janick reached out with a career-altering opportunity: becoming president of Capitol Music Group.

Parsa took the leap, but her presidency comes amid major changes at UMG — among them, a major shake-up of the company's recorded-music division. So far, Parsa has risen to the challenge of leading the reorientation of the eminent 80-year-old label — now home to influential artists like Ice Spice, Maggie Rogers, Doechii and Troye Sivan — while keeping her love of creative A&R at her core.

How were you recruited for this role?
I was nearing the end of my deal at UMPG, and I've always admired Janick. When he told me about this position ... he said, "I think you have all the tools for this. Come and try it." From there, it all happened very fast. When he told me that I would be working closely with Tom [March, Capitol chairman/CEO], I thought it would be a cool way to enter the label system.

In your new role, how involved are you with A&R and creative work?
When you get into this new role, people assume you will take a step back. But I feel that in the way I've been positioned in this role, I can stay creative. Obviously, there's more responsibility and leadership, too, but it's funny: As I've been meeting potential artists and managers, they ask, "Is there a day-to-day on this?" And I'm like, "Yeah, me." I always want to do it.

How did working in publishing affect the way you approach recorded music?
Working in publishing was a cheat code. As a publisher, I would go meet with every label, every A&R. I got to see how different A&Rs pitched their artists in ways label A&Rs didn't get to see. I got a really good bird's-eye view of the industry, including how our competitors maneuver. It's also so helpful to be close to writers and producers. They are a great sounding board for me when I'm working with the artists signed to Capitol. Publishing really trained my ear and gave me a network of valuable relationships, and those relationships don't die after six years working with them. In a weird way, I've gotten even closer to some of my former clients. —KRISTIN ROBINSON

Ice Spice

CHERIF: COURTESY OF ROLLING LOUD. CHERTOFF: ASHLEY CAROLINE. CLEES: COURTESY OF RIAA. PARSA: ABIGAIL ROSS. ICE SPICE: THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES.

40 UNDER 40

LINDSAY DWORMAN

Director of global touring
AEG PRESENTS

Dworman's strong year included working on tours for Maggie Rogers, Caroline Polachek and Declan McKenna — plus serving as talent buyer for the inaugural Re:SET concert series, a new festival format where daily bills headlined by boygenius, LCD Soundsystem and Steve Lacy rotated among three markets every weekend for four consecutive weekends. The 31-year-old's 2024 highlight is her work with British band The Last Dinner Party: "Just seeing how they've just taken off and grown ... I think it's really, really special with them."

The best advice I've received is "Jeff Rasko at CAA was always adamant that every email should be responded to within 24 hours."

DIAA EL ALL

Founder/CEO
SOUNDFUL

With Soundful, El All is facilitating a future where AI helps, rather than replaces, songwriters. The company prioritizes consent and compensation for artists, whether hosting camps to teach musicians how to write alongside the generative-AI beatmaker or teaming with Starrah, 3LAU and Kaskade on the launch of Soundful Collabs, which El All says lets users create tracks mirroring artists' styles "while offering an ethical path for content monetization." For El All, 35, training AI models on musicians' copyrights is essential; to that end, he got Soundful certified by nonprofit Fairly Trained.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "Building a product somewhere that helps dismantle barriers to entry across various industries."

ZACH FRIEDMAN

Co-president
10K PROJECTS

Friedman, who joined 10K in 2022 after the company purchased his Homemade Projects label with Tony Talamo, calls working with breakthrough 10K artist Ice Spice and her team "incredibly rewarding" while also citing the success of Artemas' "I Like the Way You Kiss Me," which peaked at No. 12 on the Hot 100 in April. "On the business side, having Warner Music Group as our new partners has been a milestone moment," adds Friedman, 32, of the deal that made 10K a stand-alone label under the WMG umbrella.

The best advice I've received is "I know he didn't coin the phrase, but [10K founder and CEO] Elliot Grainge is always saying, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' which has really helped me through the years."

Intelligent Design

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE is one of the buzziest — and most rapidly changing — areas of the music business today. A year after the fake-Drake song signaled the technology's potential applications (and dangers), industry lobbyists on Capitol Hill, like RIAA's Tom Clees, are working to create guard rails to protect musicians — and maybe even get them paid. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs like Soundful's Diaa El All and BandLab's Meng Ru Kuok (who oversees the platform as founder and CEO of its parent company, Caldecott Music Group) are showing naysayers that AI can enhance human creativity rather than just replacing it. Technology and policy experts alike have promoted the use of ethical training data and partnered with groups like Fairly Trained and the Human Artistry Coalition to set a positive example for other entrants into the AI realm.

What is your biggest career moment with AI?

DIAA EL ALL I'm proud of starting our product Soundful Collabs. We found a way to do it with the artists' participation in an ethical way and that we're not infringing on any of their actual copyrighted music. With Collabs, we make custom AI models that understand someone's production techniques and allow fans to create beats inspired by those techniques.

MENG RU KUOK Being the first creation platform to support the Human Artistry Coalition was a meaningful one. We put our necks out there as a tech company where people would expect us to actually be against regulation of AI. We don't think of ourselves as a tech company. We're a music company that represents and helps creators. Protecting them in the future is so important to us.

TOM CLEES I've been extremely proud to see that our ideas are coming through in legislation like the No AI Fraud Act in the House [and] the No Fakes Act in the Senate.

The term "AI" represents all kinds of products and companies. What do you consider the biggest misconception around the technology?

CLEES There are so many people who work on these issues on Capitol Hill who have only ever been told that it's impossible to train these AI platforms and do it while respecting copyright and doing it fairly, or that it couldn't ever work at scale. *(To El All and Kuok.)* A lot of them don't know enough about what you guys are doing in AI. We need to get [you both] to Washington now.

KUOK One of the misconceptions that I educate [others about] the most, which is counterintuitive to the AI conversation, is that AI is the only way to empower people. AI is going to have a fundamental impact, but we're taking for granted that people have access to laptops, to studio equipment, to afford guitars — but most places in the world, that isn't the case. There are billions of people who still don't have access to making music.

EL ALL A lot of companies say, "It can't be done that way." But there is a way to make technological advancement while protecting the artists' rights. Meng has done it, we've done it, there's a bunch of other platforms who have, too. AI is a solution, but not for everything. It's supposed to be the human plus the technology that equals the outcome. We're here to augment human creativity and give you another tool for your toolbox.

What predictions do you have for the future of AI and music?

CLEES I see a world where so many more people are becoming creators. They are empowered by the technologies that you guys have created. I see the relationship between the artist and fan becoming so much more collaborative.

KUOK I'm very optimistic that everything's going to be OK, despite obviously the need for daily pessimism to [inspire the] push for the right regulation and policy around AI. I do believe that there's going to be even better music made in the future because you're empowering people who didn't necessarily have some functionality or tools. In a world where there's so much distribution and so much content, it enhances the need for differentiation more, so that people will actually stand up and rise to the top or get even better at what they do. It's a more competitive environment, which is scary ... but I think you're going to see successful musicians from every corner of the world.

EL ALL I predict that AI tools will help bring fans closer to the artists and producers they look up to. It will give accessibility to more people to be creative. If we give them access to more tools like Soundful and BandLab and protect them also, we could create a completely new creative generation. —K.R.

DWORMAN: COURTESY OF LINDSAY DWORMAN. EL ALL: COURTESY OF SOUNDFUL. FRIEDMAN: MARIAH LONG.

MILES GERSH

Vp of A&R

WARNER RECORDS

For Gersh, who handles day-to-day A&R duties for Zach Bryan, the past year's highlight was watching the country-rocker's meteoric rise, including topping the Billboard 200 and the Hot 100. "I try to identify the best unsigned artists in the world and do what it takes to help them reach their potential," says Gersh, 29, who's also an A&R executive for Veeze, Bella Poarch and Pecos & The Rooftops, among others. "A lot of the job is working inside our building and collaborating across departments to fulfill the artists' vision."

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "Playing for the Lakers."

JOE GIORDANO JR.

Vp of Stadium, Arena and Theater Alliance

OAK VIEW GROUP

A veteran of arenas including BOK Center in Tulsa, Okla., Giordano oversees Oak View Group's Stadium, Arena and Theater Alliance, the invitation-only member organization representing best-in-class venues in major markets. "Our philosophy is 'Book together, buy together, sell together and think together,' " says the 34-year-old, who facilitates idea-sharing among alliance members to "make sure they get their [return on investment] in terms of booking, marketing, sponsorships and data points."

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "Going to culinary school and cooking. My wife and I love *The Bear* and other cooking shows."

DAVID GOLDSEN

Vp of A&R

WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

"Hits come and go, but I've always viewed being a music publisher as an art of patience and longevity," says the 37-year-old Goldsen, whose roster includes Zach Bryan and Mitski. In September 2023, the former's Kacey Musgraves duet, "I Remember Everything," debuted at No. 1 on the Hot 100 with the help of streaming and social media — just one month before the latter debuted on the chart with "My Love Mine All Mine" in October.

The best concert I've seen is "All of the Rage Against the Machine shows I went to, from Coachella to Rock the Bells, when they reunited in 2007."

JINGU JANG

Vp

BIGHIT MUSIC

After one-and-a-half "transformative" years as part of HYBE chairman Bang Si-Hyuk's corporate staff, Jang, 36, applied his learnings to the solo projects of five BTS members in 2023, for which he oversaw budgeting, team selection, overall creative vision and strategy, and more. Among the results: With "Like Crazy," Jimin became the first K-pop soloist to top the Hot 100, and Jung Kook's huge *Golden* opening week set a record for the biggest week for an album (210,000 equivalent album units) by a Korean singer.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "Working for a sports team. Funny enough, being in artist management now feels like a parallel universe — just a different kind of stage."

RACHELLE JEAN-LOUIS

Co-founder/manager

TELL YOUR FRIENDS

Tell Your Friends' roster includes Victoria Monét, whose five-year journey from go-to songwriter (Ariana Grande) to solo star landed her three Grammys in February, including best new artist. "Each creative I work with, I identify with some piece of their story personally and figure out the best ways to get their art to the world, with hopes it helps others that identify with them, too," says Jean-Louis, 33. "From idea to execution, I'm building talented, dedicated teams around artists like Victoria and laying the foundation of a sustainable business."

The best concert I've seen is "Beyoncé. Most recently, *Renaissance*. But I've seen multiple shows of hers, multiple times... they've all been incredible in their own ways."

MOODY JONES

GM of EMPIRE Dance

EMPIRE

Jones' mission of building EMPIRE's presence in the dance space includes signing and developing talent, marketing the genre to new audiences and overseeing the company's dance department. EMPIRE acquired the influential Dirtybird label in 2022 — and, in 2023, guided it to its biggest streaming year ever. Jones, 36, executive-produced the company's African/dance crossover album, *House of EMPIRE*, which featured African artists including Fireboy DML, Kizz Daniel and Black Sherif. He says he's excited about artists from across genres "using dance music to enter new dancefloors and reach broader audiences."

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "An actor. It would be cool to live a different life every six months."

GERSH: DARRELL ANN. GIORDANO: JOSH NEW. GOLDSEN: JONATHAN WEINER. JANG: BIGHIT MUSIC. JEAN-LOUIS: DALVIN ADAMS. JONES: BRYAN BERRY.

JOSEPH KHOURY

Senior vp of A&R and marketing

ATLANTIC RECORDS

Khoury, 35, says he connects artists with "opportunities across film, TV, sports and video games, while also doing A&R and marketing for Atlantic's soundtrack projects." And Atlantic had an impressive 2023 in the soundtrack space: *Barbie: The Album* debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200, while *Aurora*, the album that accompanied the Amazon series *Daisy Jones & The Six*, launched atop *Billboard*'s Soundtracks chart. Khoury helped produce both.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "At the range trying to live out my *Happy Gilmore* fantasy — or head coach of the Philadelphia Eagles."

MENG RU KUOK

Founder/CEO

CALDECOTT MUSIC GROUP

BandLab Technologies surprised the music industry when then-unknown teenager d4vd used its browser-based digital audio workstation to make 2022's "Romantic Homicide" — which joined Spotify's Billions Club in March — but many young music-makers have been utilizing the playful, user-friendly tool since its inception in 2015. BandLab is just one of the brands under the aegis of multisector investor Caldecott Music Group, which also includes NME Networks — whose print relaunch of *NME* Kuok, 35, cites as a 2023 highlight — and Vista Musical Instruments.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "Enjoying a cold drink on a beach in the Maldives after a midafternoon nap."

PETER KURCZABA

Senior director of creative sync

PRIMARY WAVE MUSIC

In his role, Kurczaba maintains relationships with external parties like music supervisors while collaborating with creatives "to create new reimaginations in the form of covers and remixes for our catalog, specifically with synch licensing opportunities in mind." Last year, his team placed Ed Sheeran's "A Beautiful Game," co-written by Primary Wave's Foy Vance, in *Ted Lasso* — and the track won an Emmy Award for outstanding original music and lyrics. "It was such a triumph the song made it over the finish line and was used in the season finale in a pivotal, heartwarming scene," says Kurczaba, 32.

The best concert I've seen is "Taylor Swift at SoFi Stadium in L.A. She has such an admirable respect and dedication to her craft and her fans."

Jon Coombs

Vp of A&R

SECRETLY GROUP

AT JON COOMBS' wedding in 2017, Angel Olsen performed her song "Some Things Cosmic." Several years prior, it was the first song by the singer-songwriter that Coombs had ever heard, and it was, he recalls, "a true game-changer for me, personally." It was a game-changer for Olsen, too: After Coombs heard it, the A&R executive signed her to the Secretly Group sublabel Jagjaguwar.

As vp of A&R for Secretly Group — which, in addition to Jagjaguwar, encompasses Dead Oceans, Secretly Canadian, Saddest Factory Records and Secretly Publishing — Coombs has shaped the face of indie music today from Olsen, his first signee, through many others now including Mitski, Faye Webster and Mustafa.

It all might've seemed unlikely for Coombs, now 38, who as a kid growing up in southern Indiana pored over the thank-you's in the liner notes of the CDs he bought with his allowance. "I was just like, 'OK, sure, Mom and Dad.' But then it was like, 'Everyone at label name,' " he says. "That's when I started to connect the dots — there's labels. I started getting fascinated with label culture."

He first noticed Bloomington, Ind.-based Secretly Canadian on the back of The Impossible Shapes' 2003 album, *We Like It Wild*, and ended up interning at Secretly Distribution while a student at Indiana University. A series of pivotal events followed: Shortly before Coombs graduated, Bon Iver released the seminal *For Emma, Forever Ago* on Jagjaguwar (already affiliated with Secretly Canadian; the Secretly Group moniker would come later); a key employee on Secretly Group's small staff departed; and Coombs landed a job there. He hasn't left.

Coombs

Back then, Coombs wore "a lot of hats" — something he still points to as a benefit of working at an indie label, for those starting out in the industry — but once he moved to New York in 2010 to open the label's office in the city, he gravitated toward project management, A&R and synch licensing. In the mid-2010s, Coombs was also heavily involved in launching Secretly's publishing division. But regardless of his role or which artist on the label group's eclectic roster he's working with, Coombs says his guiding principle has been "championing the unobvious."

Mitski

Today, Secretly's artists are among the indie world's most visible. Phoebe Bridgers recently opened dates on Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour, genre-melding trio Khruangbin plays to sizable crowds around the world, and Mitski and Webster both went viral on TikTok in 2023. (Mitski's "My Love Mine All Mine" spent a record six weeks atop the TikTok Billboard Top 50 chart last fall.) "It shows that maybe there's room for more voices — for more adventurous music in the mainstream," Coombs says when reflecting on the label group's crossover successes. "Audiences are excited for adventurous songwriters — and that's what we excel at."

—ERIC RENNER BROWN

KHOURY: OMAR GOMEZ. KUOK: COURTESY OF ROCK PAPER SCISSORS. KURCZABA: JAMES KURCZABA. COOMBS: ISAAC MARLEY MORGAN. MITSKI: MAURICIO SANTANA/GETTY IMAGES.

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MUJERES LATINAS EN LA MÚSICA

CONGRATULATIONS

TO OUR ARTISTS AND EXECUTIVES
2024 BILLBOARD LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC HONOREES

Gloria Estefan
Leyenda

Kany García
Espíritu de Cambio

EXECUTIVES

María Fernández

Nerea Igualador

SONY MUSIC | LATIN IBERIA

5020 RCRDS

JUSTIN MACCHIO

Senior vp of marketing

AWAL

As head of AWAL's artist marketing team, Macchio, 35, collaborates with a global crew to lead campaigns for select artists — notably genre-defying singer-songwriter Laufey, whose *Bewitched* debuted in the top 25 of the Billboard 200 in September, became the biggest jazz album debut in Spotify history and won a Grammy. Her success — along with that of other AWAL artists like Djo — affirms his belief that "there is still incredible value in artist development, connecting with a core fan base and building fans one by one from the ground up."

The best advice I've received is "Write every email like it's being read aloud in a courtroom."

ALEX MAXWELL

Vp of touring

LIVE NATION

Maxwell, 37, saw her Spotify Wrapped come to life last year as she promoted shows around the world for her favorite artists. Some of her highlights: Noah Kahan's sets for 25,000 people over two nights at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne, Australia; Jack Harlow's in-the-round performance at E.A. Diddle Arena in Bowling Green, Ky.; and Tyler Childers' show at the Los Angeles-area Forum, a "spiritual experience" for Maxwell with personal significance. "My parents met at the venue in 1985," she says. "Quite literally, I wouldn't exist without the Forum."

Ten years ago, I was "One year into booking the Troubadour and not taking a moment of it for granted."

DANIEL MERINO

Partner/promoter

BIZARRO LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Merino started at Bizarro, the Chile-based promoter that operates in several South American countries, at 19, working security and handing out wristbands, which helped him "have a broader view of the business today" as he leads the company's booking and operations. Bizarro's recent events include five sold-out stadium shows by Karol G in Chile and Peru and booking and producing the Viña del Mar Festival, where Merino, 34, is executive producer (and which this year featured Andrea Bocelli onstage with 130 musicians).

The best concert I've seen is "Elton John in Rio de Janeiro under torrential rain. It was magical to sing and dance to those songs in a unique atmosphere."

MANDELYN MONCHICK

Artist manager

RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT

As the "center of the wheel" of Lainey Wilson's management team, Monchick says, "My job is to keep the wheel turning and keep everyone accountable, motivated and passionate about what and who we're working for." If Wilson's success is any gauge, Monchick, 30, is doing her job well. Wilson's *Bell Bottom Country* won "the trifecta": the Academy of Country Music Awards' album of the year, the Country Music Association Awards' album of the year and the Grammys' best country album. "To witness it being recognized at this caliber was more than we could've imagined," Monchick says.

Ten years ago, I was "Finishing up my sophomore year of college, heading out to work on a ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyo., for the summer."

JOHN EDDIE PÉREZ

Senior director of A&R

SONY MUSIC U.S. LATIN

As senior director of A&R, Pérez helped assemble a roster of "AAA-level" artists including Manuel Turizo, Anuel AA, Young Miko and Fuerza Regida to be part of Marshmello's first-ever Latin album. "We were able to gather multiple artists into one project and be successful," the Miami-based executive, 35, says of the DJ-producer's *Sugar Papi*, which debuted at No. 9 on Top Latin Albums in November. "To have a global artist like Marshmello put his trust in our team to make it happen is priceless."

Ten years ago, I was "Carrying artist instruments and water bottles. Stay humble."

JAMES ROSEMOND JR.

Founder/CEO

MASTERMIND ARTISTS

Rosemond's star client, Ice Spice, secured a Dunkin' campaign in September, which included her own drink and a commercial with Ben Affleck that aired during the 2023 MTV Video Music Awards, where the 24-year-old rapper won best new artist. He says he also helped her secure her "ideal film debut role" in Spike Lee's forthcoming *High and Low*. Rosemond, 32, also manages Ice's producer, RIOTUSA, who signed a Warner Chappell Music publishing deal in June and won top producer of the year at the 2023 BMI R&B/Hip-Hop Awards.

My favorite piece of merch I own is "Ice Spice Chia Pet."

MACCHIO: AUSTIN GOMEZ. MAXWELL: JOSHUA BLACK WILKINS. MERINO: BIZARRO LIVE ENTERTAINMENT/MARKETING. MONCHICK: CECE DAWSON. PÉREZ: ALESSANDRO MARTINO/SONY MUSIC LATIN. ROSEMOND: DOWAN "STAR" WILSON.

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billboard LATIN WOMEN *IN MUSIC 2024*

The Orchard extends its congratulations to Laura Tesoriero and our partners for their prestigious recognitions and successes!

Laura Tesoriero

THE ORCHARD THE ORCHARD THE ORCHARD

SOPHIA SANSONE

Managing partner
MAKE WAKE ARTISTS

As Luke Combs' day-to-day manager, Sansone, 29, is involved with every aspect of the country superstar's business, from tour routing and merchandising to sponsorships and media; she calls Combs' "Fast Car" Grammys performance with Tracy Chapman "a really special moment for our team." But as Make Wake managing partner, Sansone's role goes far beyond Combs, encompassing strategic planning for the firm's 21 clients and employee management.

The best advice I've received is "[From my grandpa]: No matter the role, no matter the title, you respect and treat everyone equally."

PETE SIMMONS

Head of A&R, U.K.
UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

The London-based Simmons strives to "find and sign the best new songwriters and help them be in the best possible position to make the best possible music." This year, he "signed my friend Fred again..," the U.K. dance artist who has become a touring force and won the 2024 Grammy for best dance/electronic album. "He is someone I've been very close with for a long time and someone who I believe is a once-in-a-generation songwriter," says Simmons, 31. "It means the world to represent him and his songs."

The best concert I've seen is "The Prodigy at Milton Keynes Bowl when I was 15. Changed my life. That is how you do it."

TOM SKOGLUND

Artist manager
FULL STOP MANAGEMENT

Skoglund feels "lucky" to be on the management teams for Harry Styles and Tate McRae: "I get to work alongside the greatest artists in the world, helping them realize and expand upon their wildest dreams," the 36-year-old says. For McRae, those dreams included a top five Hot 100 hit with "Greedy," which peaked at No. 3 in January; making her *Saturday Night Live* musical guest debut; and embarking on a world tour. Says Skoglund: "Her insatiable drive fuels our entire team daily."

Ten years ago, I was "An analyst doing forensic accounting consulting for hedge funds in New York."

JUSTIN SPAGG

Senior vp of production, operations and experience
INSOMNIAC EVENTS

Spagg works primarily on Insomniac's flagship festival, EDC Las Vegas, and the promoter's EDC Orlando in Florida, which together in 2023 marked the largest EDC events in the company's 30-year history. He also oversees the nearly 60 full-time employees who plan and execute Insomniac's event portfolio. "Given the dynamic nature of this industry and the logistics of temporary event setups," says Spagg, 36, "I often find myself devising strategies to overcome all of the challenges involved, all with the ultimate goal of crafting unforgettable experiences for all attendees."

My favorite piece of merch I own is "Daft Punk Alive Tour shirt. I was lucky enough to see them twice on that tour."

KALEB STEELE

Tour operations
PARKWOOD ENTERTAINMENT

"Mrs. Carter and our team at Parkwood really take pride in her renowned touring legacy and look to bring an incredible show to life and create something that you've never experienced," says Steele, who leads Parkwood's touring operations, including for Beyoncé's blockbuster 2023 *Renaissance* tour, one of the highest-grossing — and most logistically complex — treks ever. "Concerts are not just about hearing your favorite songs live anymore," the 32-year-old adds. "They have become traveling theaters on the road at a massive scale."

The best concert I've seen is "2006, Bon Jovi, *Have a Nice Day* tour. I was a kid from Kentucky and got to see a real-life rock star."

EMILY STEPHENSON

President
DOWNTOWN MUSIC PUBLISHING

"I view my job as ensuring that our company is set up in a way to best serve the songs and rights owners that we have the honor of representing," says the Nashville-based Stephenson, 34, who has signed The National and Spirit Music Group, among others, since assuming her current role in January 2023. Lately, she has been contemplating how to adopt AI: "We have to make sure we protect the way AI licenses, uses and reimagines original work but also embrace the improvements it can bring to productivity, rights management and creativity."

The best advice I've received is "Protect your work/life balance."

SANSONE: KURT OZAN. SIMMONS: GEORGE QUANN. SKOGLUND: PIERS ADAMS. SPAGG: DEVIN J. DILMORE. STEELE: CATHERINE POWELL. STEPHENSON: EBRU YILDIZ.

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EN LA MÚSICA

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

Burna Boy

Osita "Duke" Ugeh

Founder/CEO

DUKE CONCEPT

Ugeh

TODAY, OSITA "Duke" Ugeh is a pivotal behind-the-scenes player for the biggest Afrobeats concerts in the United States — but his fascination with live music dates back to his youth.

Growing up in Asaba, Nigeria, Ugeh used his training in classical and liturgical music to write and play music in church and train choirs. While studying electrical engineering at Nigeria's Madonna University, he organized shows and parties, falling in love with "putting events together for people to attend."

Upon graduation, Ugeh started Duke Entertainment in 2008, but "met a lot of hurdles" producing concerts in Asaba and Calabar, so he opted for a steadier career in Lagos as a technical support engineer. Moving to New York in 2011 rekindled Ugeh's interest in promoting shows: He found the quality of local Afrobeats concerts lacking. An engineer's job "is to perform solutions for any issue," explains Ugeh, 38. With most Afrobeats shows relegated to places like warehouses, he founded Duke Concept in 2013 "to put Afrobeats in proper venues and on main stages."

In the decade since, he has succeeded and then some. Duke Concept has independently produced and promoted shows and tours for emerging and established Afrobeats artists like Burna Boy, Davido, Fireboy DML, Asake and Olamide. In April 2022, Duke Concept produced Burna Boy's concert at New York's Madison Square Garden — where he became the first Nigerian act to headline the legendary venue. "It's mind-blowing to see how far we've gone," he marvels the day after Davido's headlining Garden show in April, which he proudly declares "was a 100% Duke Concept production, no partnerships involved."

Ugeh's African heritage and long-standing relationships with Afrobeats artists have also established him as a leader in a live Afrobeats market where, he fears, some major companies are investing due to the music's popularity but without "actually [understanding] the culture"; the crowds may have diversified, but the core audience remains predominantly African, he says.

Now Duke Concept is expanding into the festival market — while maintaining Ugeh's broader vision to cater to the larger African diaspora. In April 2023, it launched Tribeville in Houston with Adekunle Gold, Simi, Oxlade and more; the festival will return in July with Davido as headliner. The promoter added two Washington, D.C., festivals this spring: Rolling Cocoa (now rebranding as Golden Cocoa) and Colors of the East, which featured lineups of Ghanaian and East African artists respectively. "There's more music from Africa than just Nigerian music," Ugeh says. Going forward, he has his eyes set on the gospel space — "Gospel music is an integral part of African culture that has not been celebrated enough," he says — along with hip-hop and R&B.

Ugeh's big dreams for Duke Concept don't stop there: "The next goal is for the company to go public," he says. "The more financial capacity you have, the more shows you're able to produce." —HERAN MAMO

DAVID WANDER

Chief digital officer

ROC NATION

Wander, 38, leads Roc Nation's digital department and digital strategy across the company's verticals — which includes the rollout and promotion of the Roc Nation-produced Super Bowl halftime show, featuring Rihanna in 2023 and Usher in 2024. Elsewhere, he says his work on the campaign for the "Book of HOV" exhibition — the 2023 Brooklyn Public Library celebration of Jay-Z's life and work — helped spur record-breaking engagement in the form of over 600,000 visitors to the installation and 36,000 new library cards.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be "Either a videographer or script supervisor."

VICTORIA WHITE-MASON

Vp of marketing

COLUMBIA RECORDS

The world is White-Mason's rodeo. The 37-year-old calls spearheading marketing efforts for Beyoncé's Billboard 200-topping *Cowboy Carter* "one of the highlights" of her career. "When more established artists [prioritize albums]," she says, "they are effectively changing the marketplace ... and actively changing our listening habits in the process." Additionally, White-Mason assists talent like Chlöe and Halle Bailey in navigating a landscape with more music — and shorter attention spans — than ever.

Ten years ago, I was "Believe it or not, a Harvard Law student! I was studying intellectual property law, thinking I wanted to start my own one-stop shop for music supervision. What can I say? My generation loves a pivot."

LINDSAY WILLIAMS

Senior vp of marketing

UNIVERSAL MUSIC ENTERPRISES

As leader of Universal Music Enterprises' marketing team, Williams helps make the old new again. In 2023, she oversaw the reissue campaigns for The Beatles' "Red" and "Blue" compilations, which included the release of "Now and Then," the Fab Four's "last" song; the albums returned to the Billboard 200's top 20 while the single debuted at No. 7 on the Hot 100. Her team also spearheaded the campaign that pushed Brenda Lee's 1958 holiday classic, "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," to the top of the Hot 100. "Short-form platforms have transformed catalog," says Williams, 39. "The age of a release no longer matters."

The best concert I've seen is "Prince at The Troubadour in 2011. Still in shock I got tickets."

BURNA BOY: ROBERT OKINE/GETTY IMAGES. UGEH: ZAAWADI KALEM. WANDER: ROC NATION. WHITE-MASON: MEAVA KOMENAN. WILLIAMS: DARRICK WILLIAMS.

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METHODOLOGY: Nominations for *Billboard*'s executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a link is sent to press representatives by request before the nomination period. (Please email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard*'s 40 Under 40 list was chosen by editors from selected industry sectors, based on factors including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors. In addition to information requested with nominations, editors consider industry impact as measured by metrics including, but not limited to, chart, sales and streaming performance as measured by Luminate and social media impressions using data available as of April 2.

Bichota Records proudly celebrates our friend and colleague
Raymond Acosta
honored on
Billboard's 2024 '40 Under 40'
Bichota
RECORDS

BILLBOARD'S 2024

LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC

THE U.S.-BASED EXECUTIVES LEADING THE LATIN MUSIC INDUSTRY

KAROL G is unstoppable. After being named Woman of the Year at *Billboard*'s Women in Music event, the Colombian star caps a stellar string of accomplishments as Latin Woman of the Year. Jessica Giraldo, her sister and an executive honoree, co-manages her.

LATIN MUSIC REVENUE in the United States continues to hit all-time highs, exceeding the $1 billion mark for a second consecutive year on the strength of 16% growth that outpaced the overall market, according to the RIAA.

That success drives *Billboard*'s decision this year to focus on executives who are U.S.-based or whose main purview is the United States. Our list of 40 reflects women in senior-most positions with demonstrable decision-making power whose companies or artists have had significant chart presence and/or influence on the *Billboard* charts. To highlight as diverse a pool of executives as possible, we are recognizing one per company.

In addition to our list of 40 executives, we are honoring 10 executives to watch, specifically acknowledging rising talents who show great promise, as well as young executives overseeing the careers of artists who are entering the *Billboard* charts for the first time and more veteran ones who head smaller companies.

As Latin music's strength grows globally, we are proud to recognize the expanding legion of women who are driving the business. In addition, eight artists will be honored during *Billboard*'s Mujeres Latinas en la Música (Latin Women in Music) telecast, produced by Telemundo and airing June 9 on the Telemundo network: Latin Woman of the Year Karol G, Ana Bárbara, Ángela Aguilar, Camila Cabello, Gloria Estefan, Kany García, Kali Uchis and La India.

LABELS, PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS

LESLIE AHRENS

Senior vp of creative, Latin America, Kobalt Music

For Ahrens, renewing Puerto Rican songwriter Rios was a highlight of the past year. "He is one of the most sought-after songwriters in the Latin market today," she says, noting that he has co-written hits including Manuel Turizo's "La Bachata," Grupo Frontera & Bad Bunny's "un x100to," Ozuna and Feid's "Hey Mor," Karol G's "Mi Ex Tenía Razón," and Peso Pluma and Grupo Frontera's "Tulum" — each with hundreds of millions of streams on Spotify alone. She recommends that young female executives find mentors and seek to gain experience rather than titles. "My golden rule is your word is all you have in the industry," she says. "Building trust is your golden ticket to success."

GISELLE DE ARMENDI

Senior vp of business and legal affairs, Warner Music Latin America

As senior vp of business and legal affairs, De Armendi has helped sign acts including Akapellah and Luar La L in the last year, in addition to previously signing Yandel and Maria Becerra. She has also collaborated with sports organizations like Kings League to bring soccer legends such as Ronaldinho to participate in Blessd's Si Sabe Fest. "Believe in yourself, don't be afraid to ask questions, and challenge yourself to learn more," she advises the next generation. "Lean into the unique positive qualities that make you a Latin woman."

MARIA FERNÁNDEZ

Executive/COO, Latin Iberia, Sony Music

Fernández highlights Sony Music's partnership with Shakira as a cornerstone of its strategy to present powerful Latin role models in international markets. "This year, her dominant presence in the Latin music scene has reinforced her status as the top Latina in music," Fernández says. She also notes the company's enhancement of live-music experiences' infrastructure and accessibility in Latin America through strategic acquisitions, as well as a roster that embodies the spirit and diversity of Latin music, including Maluma, Camilo, Kany García and Rauw Alejandro. Her advice for young female executives? Identify your excuses and stop using them.

NEREA IGUALADOR

Senior vp of commercial partnerships, Sony Music U.S. Latin

Calling it her "greatest professional achievement," Igualador created and developed the strategy behind Shakira's first full-length album in seven years, *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, which included an unprecedented four vinyl/CD editions in different colors. Nine months ahead of its release, she also worked on the partnership between Shakira and Spotify and together created Shakira's International Day in September. "Manufacturing and distributing such a confidential project globally was also a challenge," she says. "It took many months of intense work to get everything right, and we did it. It has been a great success."

CAMILA CABELLO, this issue's *Billboard* cover star, will be honored with the Global Impact award, recognizing her bilingual hit-making as well as her social impact around the world.

KAROL G: SAMI DRASIN. CABELLO: ERICA HERNANDEZ.

JESUS CORDERO

GLORIA ESTEFAN,

the original crossover queen, will be celebrated with the special Legend honor.

MARTHA LEDEZMA

Senior vp of marketing, Fonovisa Disa USA & Mexico, Universal Music

In October, Fonovisa captured the ever-growing subgenre *corridos bélicos* (which combines elements of *sierreño* and *corridos* with an *urbano* flair) on the compilation album *Bélico Indie*, which featured 15 emerging Mexican bands and artists considered torchbearers of the new style. Among them is Octavio Cuadras, now known for his catchy *corridos felices*, which scored him a collaboration with Maluma ("Bling Bling"). "Without a doubt, the development of Octavio is a highlight for me," Ledezma says, "and a testament to the importance of always searching for innovation and continuing telling stories of success."

ALEXANDRA LIOUTIKOFF

President, Latin America and U.S. Latin, Universal Music Publishing Group

Above all else, Lioutikoff is proud of her team — "the best in the Latin music industry, and it shows in our results," she says. Its latest accomplishments include winning the ASCAP Latin publisher of the year award in April (thanks to the output of writers like Feid) and signing acts like Ivan Cornejo, Carín León, Yahritza y Su Esencia, Abel Pintos and Veigh. Her advice for aspiring Latina executives: "The Latin side of the music business is changing, so work hard and get noticed."

MARY NUÑEZ

Vp of sync, U.S. Latin and Latin America, Warner Chappell Music

Nuñez secured significant Latin synch placements for Warner Chappell Music composers that ran the gamut from U.S. Hispanic broadcasters to a diverse range of brands including Coca-Cola, Formula One, Bacardi, McDonald's and T-Mobile, the lattermost for a local Super Bowl campaign that used "Livin' la Vida Loca." She also worked with major studios and collaborated on commissions for original and established songs for both TV and film, including Natanael Cano's work for HBO Max's original series *VGLY*. Nuñez says, "It has been great to see the growing importance of Latin American territories as brands expand into Central America and Mexico."

LAURA TESORIERO

Senior vp/managing director of Latin-Iberia, The Orchard

Tesoriero's substantial accomplishments at music distribution company The Orchard over the past year include signing Dominican superstar and leading *dembow* artist El Alfa for both his recordings and publishing. Additionally, she established a Miami office in collaboration with her colleague Albert Torres, senior vp of Latin-Iberia, further expanding The Orchard's reach. Her advice to budding talent in the music industry is to "immerse yourself in the various business aspects, actively seek opportunities to gain hands-on experience and consistently show resilience and determination."

VERONICA VACCAREZZA

Senior vp of business development, Latin America and U.S. Latin, Sony Music Publishing Latin America

Vaccarezza's work resulted in significant progress on the Latin America digital licensing front to improve songwriters' compensation from streaming services. "It is no secret that Latin America is a key contributor to today's global music landscape not only from a repertoire perspective but also by the sheer level of consumption and engagement from Latin American music fans," she says. "It is impending on us to make every effort to ensure songwriters are appropriately compensated." Vaccarezza also worked alongside her team to advance renewal negotiations with prominent songwriters such as Edgar Barrera, Shakira and Wisin.

ELSA YEP

COO, Universal Music Latin America & Iberian Peninsula

Universal launched its first Dolby Atmos-equipped auditorium in Latin America (in Mexico City) and oversaw a resurgence of physical sales in the region, both examples of its status as a 360 music company whose services include management and live events through GTS. It's all part of "continuing to innovate our music labels, strengthening Universal Music in the region as a diversified powerful partner to artists and their teams while fostering an internal entrepreneurial and creative environment," Yep says. Recent global successes include Feid (Spotify's sixth-most streamed artist of 2023), Karol G and Joaquina, who won the Latin Grammy Award for best new artist.

CONGRATULATIONS **COLISEO DE PUERTO RICO**
ON CELEBRATING

20 YEARS

OF ENTERTAINMENT

MANAGEMENT

MAYRA ALBA
Owner/CEO, MAAR Entertainment Management; CEO, Virtus; CEO, Sideris

Alba oversaw one of the most important Latin farewell tours of the past year, organizing a 70-concert, seven-country trek for Los Temerarios. "Working closely with the team, including promoters, we tackled challenges head-on, staying ahead of schedule and delivering exceptional performances," Alba says. "It was a testament to our teamwork and commitment to a legacy of love such as the one Los Temerarios have been delivering," she adds, noting that 60% of her team has worked with her since 2008. Alba also helped broker agreements with The Orchard (distribution) and Kobalt (publishing) that "opened up new opportunities" and "reinforced the importance of supportive relationships in business."

SONIA CLAVELL
CEO, Sonia Clavell LLC/Clavell Marketing; CEO, Diamond Music

Clavell consolidated star management client Ivy Queen's status as a "pioneer, leader and powerful figure," who among other accolades received *Billboard*'s Women in Music Icon honor, which her friend Bad Bunny presented her with. "Our collaboration reflects the importance of teamwork and mutual support, especially among women," adds Clavell, who is also in the process of launching a full-service entertainment company for female acts. "Female artists and entrepreneurs in music and entertainment need to recognize the importance and meaning of values, empowerment, unity and equity in our path toward success," she says.

PAMELA CORNEJO
Manager, Ivan Cornejo

Pamela Cornejo, the sister of rising 19-year-old artist Ivan Cornejo, says that building a team to foster her brother's success "has been something Ivan and I have worked on closely. The goal was that everyone that has a part of this would have the capability to work cohesively." One of regional Mexican music's most eclectic artists, Ivan broke out three years ago with his first single, "Está Dañada," which landed him a No. 1 entry on *Billboard*'s Latin Songwriters chart. His second album, *Dañado*, was No. 1 on Regional Mexican Albums for 37 nonconsecutive weeks, the fourth-most since the chart launched in 1985.

NATALIA CORONA
Founder, Smart Music Management

Corona and her husband, Raczon Lopez, launched Smart Music Digital to provide digital and marketing services to Mexican music artists. But her love for developing new artists helped her catapult Mexican music's latest breakout star, Xavi, and launch Smart Music Management with him as a client. As the 20-year-old's co-manager alongside Lopez, she helped Xavi reach the charts with songs like "La Diabla," which topped Hot Latin Songs and peaked at No. 2 on the Billboard Global 200 Excl. U.S. chart and No. 4 on the Billboard Global 200. "Xavi came into our hands at the best moment," Corona says. "Together with the Interscope Records team, we [have] managed to do incredible things."

NADINE ELIYA
CEO, Shak Ent.; manager, Shakira

Eliya was in the manager's seat as Shakira experienced one of the biggest resurgences in Latin music history, culminating with her 2024 album, *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, and announcement of her global tour. "The kind of longevity that Shakira enjoys is rare: to still be a trailblazer that is consistently breaking records and announcing her biggest tour yet at this stage in her career," Eliya says. In 2023, Shakira scored MTV's Video Music Awards Vanguard honor and multiple Latin Grammy wins in addition to placing two No. 1s on the Hot Latin Songs chart. "Finding new and creative ways to punctuate those achievements with fresh, unexpected performances helped us showcase why she still occupies that rarefied air as a performer," she adds.

JESSICA GIRALDO
Co-manager, Karol G

Karol G's team, structured and led by Giraldo, helped the Colombian star reach enormous heights in the past 12 months, beginning with the strategic planning and execution of her sold-out *Mañana Será Bonito* stadium tour, which in 2023 grossed $155.3 million and sold 925,000 tickets across 20 shows, according to Billboard Boxscore. She then followed up in 2024 with over 1 million tickets sold in Latin America and, in June and July, will head to Europe, where she'll play 14 arena shows, plus four sold-out dates at Santiago Bernabéu in Madrid. Giraldo also worked deals with global brands such as Crocs, Corona Global and Barça, among others. "Beyond the successes, I'm proud of the place women have in this industry," Giraldo says. "I've come across great female colleagues and am surprised at how much we can achieve with discipline and passion."

REBECA LEÓN
Founder/CEO, Lionfish Entertainment

After helming the careers of global stars like J Balvin, Juanes and Rosalía, León is currently laser-focused on the management of her two new marquee clients: Anitta and Danny Ocean. The former embarked on her global Baile Funk Experience Tour in May, which includes her first-ever North American trek, and is closing deals with Body Armour and Pandora. Meanwhile, Ocean is set to hit the road this fall with a Live Nation-produced 25-date run. León is also concentrating on building businesses outside of management. "It's exciting and humbling to learn new businesses," she says, "in the music, film/TV and investment industries."

KANY GARCÍA, five-time Latin Grammy winner and social justice champion, just scored her eighth top 10 on *Billboard*'s Latin Pop Albums chart. She is Latin Women in Music's Spirit of Change honoree.

MARY BETH KOETH

Felicidades,
Fabi
Kulick
Billboard 2024
Latin Women in Music
Executive Honoree
LIVE NATION

Salsa trailblazer **LA INDIA** will receive the Pioneer award for her groundbreaking career and the 30th anniversary of her seminal album, *Dicen Que Soy*.

EDUARDO PEREZ STUDIO

JAIME LEVINE

CEO, Seven Mantels

Once Shakira's longtime manager, Levine parted ways with her famous client a little over a year ago and took on another: Rosalía. Now Levine is expanding her management company after steering Shakira's career for more than a decade, including helming the release of her explosive "Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53." Up next is a new album for Rosalía following the success of her 2022 release, *Motomami*.

NELIDA OSEGUERA

Manager, Eslabon Armado

Eslabon Armado not only delivered its sixth consecutive No. 1 title on *Billboard*'s Regional Mexican Albums chart with *Desvelado* but also played 86 dates and had the biggest Latin song of the year. "Ella Baila Sola," the blockbuster collaboration with Peso Pluma, scored a top 10 entry on the Billboard Hot 100 — the first regional Mexican track to achieve the feat in the chart's 65-year history. Managed by members Pedro and Brian Tovar's mother, Eslabon Armado is set to conquer new territories, including Mexico. "Success is being able to work together as a family," Oseguera says. "Let your parents guide you; family is fundamental for an artist."

CLARA PABLO

Senior vp of global marketing, WK Entertainment

Pablo works with WK's marquee roster, which includes Emilia, Maluma and Wisin. But she's particularly proud of securing a global brand partnership for Maluma with BOSS for a world tour in support of his *Don Juan* album. "The Latin music industry is tough, especially for women execs," Pablo says. "You may not always find a seat at the table. In that case, build a new table and make sure to fill those seats with other female executives."

LUANA PAGANI

Founder/CEO, Fairwinds

After a 12-year tenure at Seitrack US, where she revitalized and bolstered the careers of numerous Mexican artists including Alejandro Fernández, Los Ángeles Azules, Yuridia and Ha*Ash all while maintaining profitability, the executive launched her own agency in early 2024. Her company Fairwinds focuses on artist consulting, marketing and global expansion. Reflecting on her journey, Pagani says, "It has been four creative and fascinating months working on new projects soon to be announced. At a time when there are so many possibilities to reach new audiences, it is a privilege to be able to work with dynamic artists who are redefining the musical scene."

DIANA RODRÍGUEZ

Founder/CEO, Criteria Entertainment

As Mon Laferte's longtime manager, Rodríguez is celebrating the Chilean singer-songwriter's *Autopoiética* tour as her highest-grossing trek to date with an average increase of almost 10% in ticket sales per country, she says. Rodríguez, who launched her Los Angeles-based full-service company (with offices in Colombia and Mexico) over 12 years ago, also highlights her other marquee client, Enrique Bunbury. The artist marked his comeback with his first tour in three years, in support of his latest album, *Greta Garbo*.

CLAUDIA ELENA VÁSQUEZ

CEO, Universo Vives

It has been a year of "several achievements" for Vásquez, who executed a massive celebration for husband Carlos Vives' 30-year career anniversary, culminating in his being named Person of the Year for the 2024 Latin Grammys. Among the festivities were a Vives concert at Madrid's Puerta de Alcalá attended by more than 100,000 people and a tour that concluded at Campín Stadium in Bogotá, Colombia (both executive-produced by Vásquez), plus the release of Vives' *Escalona Nunca Se Había Grabado Así*, which won best cumbia-vallenato album at the Latin Grammys. "Our team planned a strategy with great success," Vásquez adds. "I feel very proud."

ROSELA ZAVALA

CEO, EDIM Talent; manager, Ana Bárbara

Mexican singer-songwriter Ana Bárbara had one of the biggest years of her three-decade career. She scored both Latin and mainstream Grammy nominations for her independent album, *Bordado a Mano*; was honored at Premios Lo Nuestro in February; will be honored as one of *Billboard*'s Latin Women in Music; and recently announced her 34-U.S.-city Reina Grupera Tour. Throughout it all, Zavala has been at her side. "My biggest accomplishment has been to overcome new challenges hand in hand with Ana Bárbara," Zavala says, "repositioning an icon to continue leaving her legacy."

CONGRATULATIONS
JESSICA GIRALDO
BILLBOARD LATIN WOMEN IN MUSIC 2024 HONOREE
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YOUR FAMILY AT BICHOTA RECORDS
Bichota
RECORDS

ANA BÁRBARA is this year's Lifetime Achievement honoree, celebrating her three-decade career. She is managed by executive honoree Rosela Zavala, CEO of EDIM Talent.

PLATFORMS, TECH & MEDIA

ALESSANDRA ALARCÓN

President, SBS Entertainment

SBS Entertainment's focus on live shows yielded notable success in the past year by introducing diverse music genres to new markets. Its properties include the upcoming MegaBash MX at New York's UBS Arena — a multi-act Mexican music show featuring some of regional Mexican's most in-demand acts, such as Banda MS, Luis R Conriquez and Marca Registrada. "As music evolves, so does our strategy in booking while maintaining the core values of our events," says Alarcón, who has also focused on audience experience and "striking a balance between introducing new rising stars alongside the icons."

ROCÍO GUERRERO

Head of music, Latin-Iberia, Amazon Music

Guerrero spearheads Latin-Iberia's growth strategies at Amazon Music. Highlights include merchandise for Rauw Alejandro's and Romeo Santos' 2023 tours and the documentary *Hip-Hop X Siempre*, which featured interviews with Fat Joe, N.O.R.E., Residente, Snow Tha Product, Trueno and others. "My team has made lasting contributions to the cultural landscape through key moments," she says about the film. Additionally, Guerrero facilitated *Amazon Music Live* appearances by Feid and Peso Pluma and collaborated with Christian Nodal to offer exclusive benefits like ticket giveaways and presale access to Amazon Music customers during his U.S. Foraji2 Tour. Amazon also livestreamed the festivals Vibra Urbana from Miami and Vive Latino from Mexico City.

CINDY HILL

Vp of content and industry relations, Uforia, TelevisaUnivision

As her biggest accomplishment of the last year, Hill highlights the El Bueno, la Mala y el Feo Fest, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the radio show of the same name. The Dallas festival took place in November and featured performances by Grupo Frontera, Fuerza Regida, Pepe Aguilar and his children Ángela and Leonardo, among other regional Mexican artists. The sold-out event marked a significant milestone, Hill adds: "The inclusion of talented artists and musical acts reflects the excellence of our *Uforia* music series, underlining our dedication to providing unparalleled entertainment and cultural enrichment."

DARLENE LÓPEZ

U.S. lead, Latin artist and label partnerships, TikTok

López works with all genres at TikTok, but she's particularly proud of successfully advocating for regional Mexican acts such as Peso Pluma, Fuerza Regida and Eslabon Armado, rallying behind the genre with editorial initiatives like #Rompiendo and the service's first live-music event, In the Mix. "TikTok is the destination for Mexican music listeners to discover new songs and artists," she says. In doing her job, López applies the maxim that music is "one part guts, one part data. Use your cultural knowledge and your intuition to identify the artists to get behind, but back it up with the data that tells the story."

MARISSA LÓPEZ

Head of Latin artist relations, Apple Music

"We love to align with an artist's goals and passions and make sure we are showing up at every phase of their career," López says. That applies not just for album releases, "but for the long haul." She cites Bad Bunny's summer music video campaign with Pepsi in partnership with Apple Music, where the artist joined the ranks of legends like Madonna, Dr. Dre and Beyoncé. López also highlights the integration of Fuerza Regida's single "Tiki Taka Toco" at the MLS Leagues Cup and Peso Pluma's highly successful Doble P Tour, which received global exposure through Apple Music Live. "We are always looking to get it right for the culture and represent the right opportunities for artists," she says, "so that fans can feel that intimate connection with their heroes across Apple Music."

MIA NYGREN

GM, Latin America, Spotify

Spotify celebrated its 10-year anniversary as the Latin American recorded-music industry exceeded growth expectations, boasting nearly a 20% year-over-year revenue increase, Nygren says, citing IFPI's year-end numbers. "With more than 22% of Spotify's global user base in the region and one out of every five songs on our global top 100 chart, it is evident that Latin tracks and talent are reaching unprecedented heights and global awareness," she says. The company's inaugural Festival EQUAL in Buenos Aires showcased its commitment to "fair female representation across the music industry," and having Karol G among Spotify's global top 10 most streamed artists in 2023 highlighted "extraordinary female talent" and the "global appeal of Latin music."

AZUCENA OLVERA

Senior director of Latin talent and industry relations, SiriusXM/Pandora

Securing performances from renowned Latin artists like Maluma, Ozuna and Edén Muñoz for SiriusXM and Pandora was a big milestone for Olvera. As part of the Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations at Pandora LIVE El Pulso in Miami, "Ozuna performed an exclusive, powerful live show for subscribers, which aired during his takeover of SiriusXM's Caliente channel," she says. Olvera also played a key role in booking Muñoz, former lead vocalist of Calibre 50, for Pandora's inaugural regional Mexican music event in Los Angeles, while Maluma played an exclusive show during Super Bowl week in Las Vegas.

ORLANDO NARANJO

Loud And Live

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billboard MUJERES LATINAS EN LA MÚSICA

CLAUDIA ARCAY
SVP of Entertainment
Latin Women In Music Honoree, 2024

KEMELLY FIGUEROA - MOURIZ
VP, Entertainment Experiences
Latin Women In Music Executive List, 2024

LIVE & AGENCIES

ÁNGELA AGUILAR, the 20-year-old daughter of Mexican music icon Pepe Aguilar, is the Musical Dynasty honoree and has placed three No. 1s on *Billboard*'s Regional Mexican Airplay chart.

SERGIO VALENZUELA

CLAUDIA ARCAY

Senior vp of entertainment, Loud And Live

Loud And Live closed 2023 with a record-breaking 400-plus shows and nearly 2 million tickets sold across the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Latin America, placing it at No. 14 on Billboard Boxscore's Top Promoters chart. "With a strategic approach and a commitment to delivering top-notch entertainment, my direct efforts led to negotiating and carrying out some of Loud And Live's most successful tours," says Arcay, highlighting Laura Pausini, Los Ángeles Azules, Silvestre Dangond, Alejandro Sanz, Carlos Vives, Camilo, Reik, Grupo Firme and Ricardo Arjona, among others. Arcay was also "critical" to Loud And Live's expansion in Latin American countries like Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Colombia.

CAROLINA DAZA

Head of live entertainment, Cárdenas Marketing Network

One of Daza's biggest accomplishments in the past year was working on Luis Miguel's massive world tour, which kicked off in August with 10 sold-out shows at Movistar Arena in Buenos Aires. His Argentine run alone brought in $13.9 million from 105,000 tickets. Miguel then played 66 dates in 2023 that included the United States, Latin America and his home country of Mexico. Now the Latin pop crooner is continuing his trek in 2024 with over 110 shows, including two sold-out dates at Santiago Bernabéu in Madrid.

DANIA ECHEVERRI

Vp of cross-cultural marketing, CAA Brand Consulting, a division of CAA

"Take the risk" is the best advice Echeverri can offer other young female executives. That's what she did in December by helping conceptualize and launch CAA Latino, an agencywide, cross-department initiative to drive new opportunities to its Latino and Hispanic clients and "support and amplify Latino representation in media and entertainment." Echeverri also oversees CAA's multicultural Brand Consulting practice, helping brands navigate U.S. Hispanic audiences with authenticity. "As my *abuelita* would always say to me, go for the yes because the no is already there. Never be afraid to ask," she says, "whether in your career or on a deal."

ASHLEY GONZÁLEZ

Agent, WME

As part of the WME Latin division, González's successes include Luis Miguel's world tour. She also highlights Ivan Cornejo playing for over 67,000 people at the Houston Rodeo, Xavi's debut stint with 28 sold-out dates and Juanes selling out all 27 of his dates as well. In addition, WME signed Paulo Londra, Danny Ocean and Mexican newcomer Bruses. "I really enjoy growing an artist's career with them from the early stages," she says.

FABI KULICK

Head of marketing, Latin global touring, Live Nation

For Kulick, successfully leading the marketing efforts of Karol G's *Mañana Será Bonito* tour has been a standout accomplishment in a year when Live Nation significantly increased its number of Latin tours in all genres. The Colombian talent became the first Latina artist to ever headline a global stadium tour and was the highest-grossing Latin touring act of 2023, taking in $155.3 million and selling 925,000 tickets from 20 shows. "Working alongside such an inspiring woman and witnessing her making history and breaking records worldwide is a privilege and an honor," Kulick says.

ANA CHRISTINA ORDÓÑEZ

Vp, Magnus Media

Ordóñez keeps busy managing a roster of seven artists. She notably oversaw Fonseca's 35-date Viajante Tour and helped bring together his Juan Luis Guerra-assisted single, "Si Tú Me Quieres" — "a longtime dream collaboration" that won the Latin Grammy for best tropical song. She also led the release strategy for Gente de Zona's album *Demasiado* and managed the act's worldwide tour, and signed Bacilos, the Colombian band with a 25-year history, to Magnus Management. The last 12 months have included "more than 100 concerts [globally], 32 award nominations, 20 single releases and three albums," she says.

LIZ ROCA

Director of tour marketing, UTA

Through her work with UTA's roster, which includes Bad Bunny, Karol G and Young Miko, Roca has witnessed firsthand Latin music's global takeover. "When I started my career over 20 years ago, this community and the artists who represented it were limited by language barriers, access in the entertainment industry and outdated stereotypes," she says, adding that she considers being part of "an undoubtedly phenomenal shift in the music industry" a major accomplishment. UTA's clients have "broken through barriers and shaped culture," Roca adds. "Their music challenges social norms and ignores the idea of national borders entirely to reach fans everywhere."

ASCAP CELEBRATES
HOOTIE & THE BLOWFISH

Photo by Chris & Todd Owyoung

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**AFTER THREE DECADES,
WE STILL ONLY WANNA BE WITH YOU!**

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Executives To Watch

Our list of Latin names to watch was selected based on one of two considerations. The first was status as a rising executive at a company that is having chart impact or through work with a chart-impacting new artist. We have also included more senior executives who are facilitating demonstrable change and generating tangible growth within new or established companies. Our aim is to include young executives, but also senior ones who work within smaller but relevant companies.

BRENDA CARRASCO

Vp of marketing and artist strategy, Warner Music Latina

Carrasco worked projects from stars like Dua Lipa, Ed Sheeran, Bruno Mars and Cardi B internationally before moving to the U.S. Latin team, which allowed her to understand different markets and strategies. She led marketing, artist strategy and commercial teams to a successful release of *The Academy: Segunda Misión*. The multi-act set reached No. 8 on *Billboard*'s Latin Rhythm Albums chart. "Our outside-of-the-box mindset led us to a great result," she says.

ISABEL ECHEVERRI

Strategic partner manager, music label partnerships, Latin America & Iberia, Meta

Echeverri's multiple campaigns included securing Ela Taubert for Instagram's first consumer marketing campaign in Mexico and partnering with Universal Music Latin for two campaigns: the Meta-hosted "Baile Funk" party during the Latin Grammys, with a performance by Anitta, and promoting two singles off Feid's new album at the Formula One Grand Prix in Mexico City. "There's no one-size-fits-all approach to success in the music industry," she says.

MANUELA FERRADAS

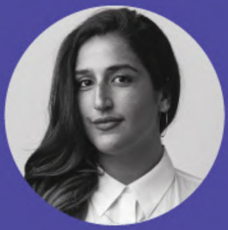
Head of U.S./international marketing manager, Dale Play Records

Ferradas joined Dale Play in 2020 as the fourth employee of the burgeoning indie label. She now oversees and coordinates all marketing strategies for Dale Play's international roster, including Bizarrap, who won three Latin Grammys, performed at Coachella and had his first headlining U.S. tour; Duki, whose first U.S. tour sold out in under 24 hours; and Nicki Nicole, who recently announced her first U.S. tour. "There is no limit to how far we can go," Ferradas says.

KEMELLY FIGUEROA-MOURIZ

Vp of touring and entertainment experience, Loud And Live

Figueroa-Mouriz helped grow Loud And Live's touring business, overseeing outings by artists including Ricardo Arjona, Carlos Vives and Ricardo Montaner and cementing the company's position at No. 14 on Billboard Boxscore's Top Promoters chart. She has also been critical to Loud And Live's expansion of its marketing and partnership business, including helping to negotiate the historic J Balvin-McDonald's partnership in 2021. More recently, she worked on the Ritmo y Color partnership with Camilo and McDonald's, a McDonald's campaign with Young Miko and Becky G's partnership with Vita Coco.



KARINA GONZÁLEZ

Vp of touring and development, Zamora Live

After nine years at UTA, where she worked on Karol G's Bichota Reloaded Tour, González joined Zamora Live in 2022 with the mission to grow the company's business abroad, specifically in Latin America. That materialized with eight dates for Los Temerarios, which brought Zamora into Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Costa Rica for the first time. González was also integral in the organization and promotion of the debut U.S. tours by Tini and Young Miko.

MARIANA LÓPEZ

Manager, Young Miko

López manages Young Miko, whose debut album, *att.*, debuted in the top 10 of the Top Latin Albums and Latin Rhythm charts in April. The Puerto Rican rapper, who also made her debut performance at Coachella in April, will kick off her headlining XOXO Tour in July, playing over 30 dates in the United States. "Pursue ideas/projects that motivate you and that you feel passionate about," López says. "Create your opportunities and visualize yourself at every step toward the future."

YVETTE MEDINA

Head of Latin/executive manager, YMU

After signing Snow Tha Product as a client, Medina negotiated her göt2b Color Remix U.S. campaign, which used her song "Waves" and spanned digital, video, out-of-home advertising and a live component at select tour dates. Medina joined YMU after launching her own artist management company with clients like Ecko. She continues to manage her original roster alongside the global YMU team and oversees the company's operations within the wider Latin music community.

CARRASCO: WARNER MUSIC LATINA. ECHEVERRI: NATHAN WEST. FERRADAS: GARCIA. FIGUEROA-MOURIZ: IVAN APFEL. GONZÁLEZ: COURTESY OF KARINA GONZÁLEZ. LÓPEZ: JOSHUA RIVERA. MEDINA: MIKEY ACUNA.

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SOCIETIES

CRISTINA NADAL

Director of account management and operations, Interscope Capitol Labels Group

Nadal began her career with an admin job at Interscope Records and has risen to become a key member, contributing to projects by some of Latin music's most exciting stars, including Karol G and breakout artists Xavi and Ivan Cornejo. "It has been an honor to be part of the Interscope team since the opening of the office in Miami back in 2019 and witness its incredible growth, particularly over the last year," she says.

NELLY ORTIZ

COO, Ntertain

Ortiz's highlights as COO of the multiprong entertainment company include launching the Nvision Film & Music Festival, the result of a merger with The Official Latino Film Festival, and Tainy's participation in the *Rebel Moon* EP inspired by the Netflix series. "No idea is too small, and most importantly, being able to imagine an idea from inception to execution is a feeling that is irreplaceable," she says.

MARYLU RAMOS

Founder/CEO, Varlian/Oplaai/MAM Media

Ramos, who has overseen marketing efforts for Carín León for the past six years, including for his 2023 album, *Colmillo de Leche*, founded distribution company Varlian with a team comprising 90% women and launched a music hub with a content studio as a resource for her clients in Los Angeles. After spearheading development of rising Mexican star El Rabbanito, she signed her first "100%" management deal with Meño Segovia, assembling a team that's also mostly female.

GABRIELA GONZÁLEZ

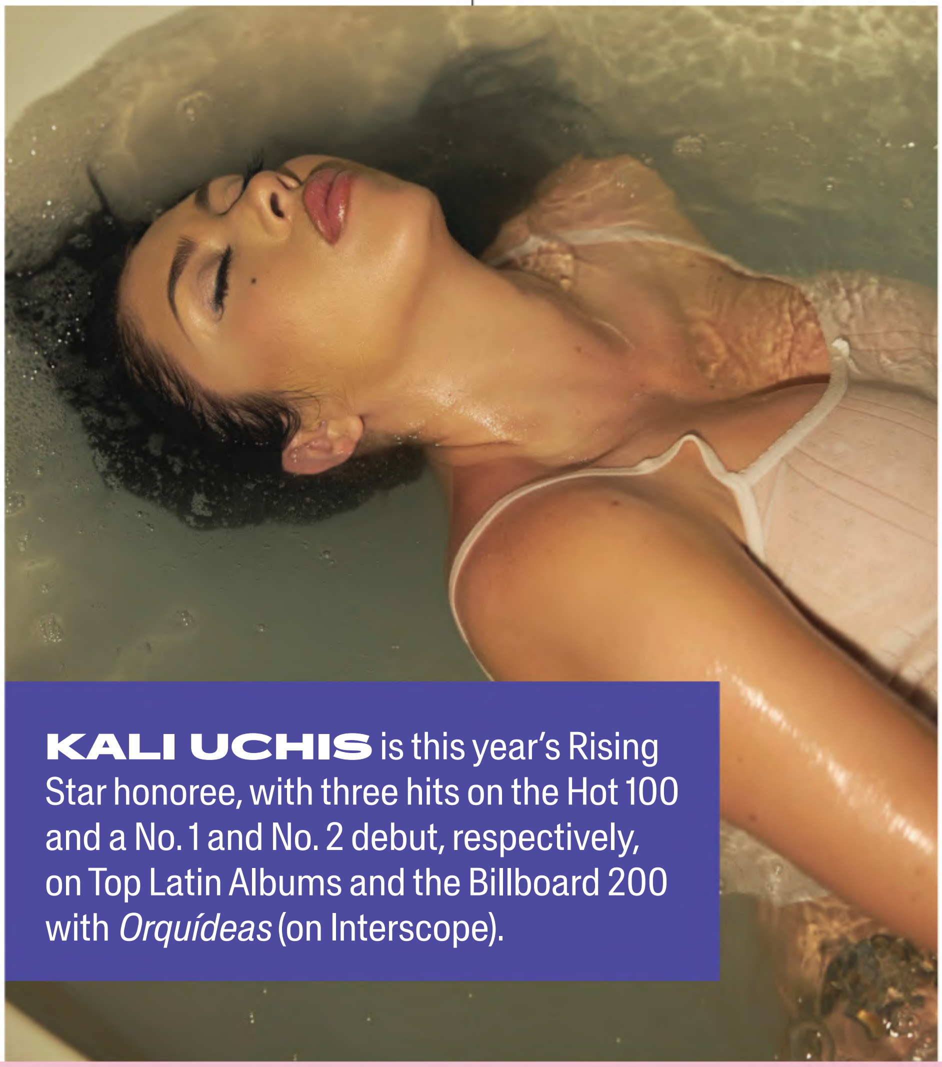
Senior vp of Latin membership and international affairs, ASCAP

In 2023, ASCAP's overall revenue grew by 14.1% to $1.7 billion and payouts to songwriters and publishers increased 14.7% to $1.6 billion — both ASCAP records. Meanwhile, its foreign revenue in 2023 increased by 19.4%, up $410 million, with Latin playing an important role. "We have a fantastic Latin membership team," González says, "which has helped me to support ASCAP's international affairs department and our partnerships with societies in Latin America, Spain and Portugal."

CELESTE ZENDEJAS

Senior vp, SESAC Latina

In her new role as senior vp, Zendejas secured regional Mexican artist Pepe Aguilar's signing and renewed reggaetón star Nicky Jam's affiliation. The latter global hit-maker has been signed to the company since 2015, and SESAC will continue to license public performances of his songwriting catalog globally. Both are fitting successes as SESAC Latina celebrates its 30th anniversary with a roster that also includes Yahritza Martinez and her brothers and Edén Muñoz. "Being a woman in this industry is challenging," Zendejas says, "but if you focus, work hard, love what you do and don't let anyone or anything stop you from reaching your goals, you can become very successful."



KALI UCHIS is this year's Rising Star honoree, with three hits on the Hot 100 and a No. 1 and No. 2 debut, respectively, on Top Latin Albums and the Billboard 200 with *Orquídeas* (on Interscope).

NADAL: CAMILA CALERO. ORTIZ: IVAN BERRIOS. RAMOS: NANCY RAMOS. UCHIS: AMAURY NESSAIBIA.

TUNE IN >> ***Billboard's Mujeres Latinas en la Música*, a Telemundo production, will air on Telemundo on June 9 at 9 p.m./8 p.m. CDT.**

CONTRIBUTORS Leila Cobo, Grisleda Flores, Sigal Ratner-Arias, Isabela Raygoza, Jessica Roiz

METHODOLOGY Executives were selected primarily based on their company's or their artist's or combined artists' activity on the *Billboard* charts, including year-end recaps such as Top Latin Albums, Hot Latin Songs, Hot Latin Songs Artists, Top Latin Albums, Top Latin Imprints, Top Latin Publishers and Top Latin Publishing Corporations, as well as the Billboard Boxscore charts.

CONGRATULATIONS DARIUS, MARK, DEAN, AND SONI ON

30 YEARS OF CRACKED REAR VIEW

AND MORE THAN 22 MILLION ALBUMS SOLD!

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Photo Credit: Todd & Chris Owyoung

HOOTIE & THE BLOWFISH

on 30 years of indelible music and memories!

Hootie & The Blowfish today (top from left): Felber, Bryan, Rucker and Sonefeld. Inset: a promotional photo used on the band's flyers in the early '90s.

CLEAR IN THE REAR VIEW

Hootie & The Blowfish, three decades after their smash debut album, return with a summer tour — and time to look back

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

BY THE TIME Hootie & The Blowfish released their Atlantic Records debut, *Cracked Rear View*, on July 5, 1994, the band had already been together for more than eight years. Singer Darius Rucker and guitarist Mark Bryan met while attending the University of South Carolina and began gigging as a cover band called The Wolf Brothers. They were joined by bassist Dean Felber and drummer Brantley Smith, who was eventually replaced by Jim "Soni" Sonefeld. And Hootie & The Blowfish was born.

During the height of the grunge movement, Atlantic Records A&R executive Tim Sommer signed the quartet, which had already built a strong regional following for its jangly, harmony-filled pop rock songs and Rucker's rich baritone. But the label's expectations for the album were low.

"The only people [at Atlantic] championing us at the time were Tim and [Atlantic's then-president] Danny Goldberg," Rucker recalls. "One guy actually said that if they put *Cracked Rear View* out, they'd be the laughingstocks of the music business. Grunge was king, and nobody was looking for this pop/rock band out of South Carolina."

But *Cracked Rear View* surpassed all expectations — and then some, to put it mildly. Bolstered by the singalong, uplifting first single, "Hold My Hand," the album bounced into the top spot on the Billboard 200 five times and has been certified 21 times platinum by the RIAA, signifying sales of more than 21 million units in the United States. The album, which took its name from a lyric in a John Hiatt song, is the highest-certified debut album of all time, according to RIAA data.

Thirty years later, to mark the anniversary of *Cracked Rear View*, Hootie & The Blowfish are staging the Summer Camp With Trucks Tour on a bill with Collective Soul and Edwin McCain.

Today, Bryan and Rucker fondly remember making the album with producer Don Gehman (R.E.M., John Mellencamp), whom they still work with; their favorite moment at the 1996 Grammy Awards; and where they were when the album first went to No. 1.

You started as a cover band, The Wolf Brothers. When did you start writing your own songs?

MARK BRYAN We were having fun doing the acoustic covers in the meantime, just the two of us. But I think we were always dreaming a little bigger, for sure. Then as Hootie, when we were in school, we started writing, but it was nothing we would want to share with you. (*Laughs.*)

DARIUS RUCKER We had decided that we wanted to make a change and [do] mostly originals. So when Brantley [Smith] left and with [Jim "Soni" Sonefeld] coming in, he made it an easy transition. We had written a couple of songs, but when Soni came in, we really started writing.

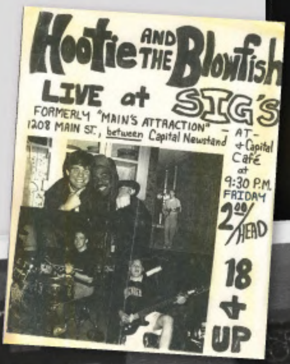
Soni came in with "Hold My Hand," right?

RUCKER He played that the day he auditioned for us. He walked out of the room and I told the other guys, "He's in the band!"

There were certain songwriters and acts you adored, like Radney Foster and R.E.M. How did they influence your sound?

RUCKER There's always such a country element, and all of that comes from Radney Foster and [Bill]

HOOTIE: TODD & CHRIS OWYOUNG. ARCHIVE: COURTESY OF HOOTIE & THE BLOWFISH.



Clockwise from left: a flyer for a show while the band members were still students at the University of South Carolina; a performance in Raleigh, N.C., during the 2019 Group Therapy Tour; a gig at Columbia, S.C., club Greenstreets in the early '90s.

Lloyd. That jangly guitar we use definitely comes from R.E.M. [member] Peter Buck's guitar with the jingle. It was rock'n'roll but it wasn't metal. It was something we could do.

Who is an act people would be surprised to know influenced the band?

RUCKER We listened to a lot of rap along with those country songs. Digital Underground and De La Soul and those bands. They influenced us in a big way. We still do [Digital Underground's] "Freaks of the Industry."

Why are the songs on the album credited to all four band members?

BRYAN We've split our publishing right down the middle from the very beginning. Nobody knew whose songs were going to be the hits. Our attorney was smart, and he was inspired by R.E.M. Not only did they inspire us musically, but they inspired us on the business side as well because they did the same thing. That fit with the way we were writing together anyway because everybody was bringing stuff in.

Despite the low expectations, the album took off. When did you realize you had a hit?

BRYAN Right when "Hold My Hand" hit, we realized our sound was connecting. Then it was "Let Her Cry," "I Only Want To Be With You" and "Time." A lot of times, it's really hard for the artist, manager and label to decide what's the right song for the [next] single. The funny thing about *Cracked Rear View* is there was never any question. I've never seen anything like it before or since.

Where were you when the album went to No. 1 for the first of its five times?

RUCKER We were on the road, and it had been moving [up the charts] so much, we were waiting for it to go to No. 1. Then you get that phone call that you're finally the No. 1 record in the country. It was like, "Great. Let's go play a show!" When you have so many naysayers and then you have the No. 1 record, it's a pretty great feeling. You're not [considered] cool, but you're selling half a million albums a week.

The melodies are so upbeat and jangly that it was easy to overlook a lot of the darkness or messages in the lyrics. For example, "Drowning" is about racism. Did you feel some people didn't understand what you were saying?

RUCKER One hundred percent. I still don't. "Hold My Hand" was a protest song. That's a song about "Why are we hating each other?" You've got "Drowning," and "Not Even the Trees" is such a dark song. "Let Her Cry" is a dark song. I think some people were caught up in "Hold My Hand" and "I Only Want To Be With You" and they didn't look any deeper than that.

BRYAN I think Darius was very overt with "Drowning," but that wasn't our intention on a lot of our songs. It was more of that subtle approach to that, which is just treating each other right. I think there were other lyrics, here and there, where he was telling you about how he was feeling as a Black man in America at the time. It would have been nice if people caught up more on that. And I think from our end, too, with the fame that we got, we maybe had a responsibility to write into that a little more, and I don't know if we ever resolved that.

For the 30th anniversary, do you wish people would give it a deeper listen?

RUCKER We wish they would but they won't, and the thing that really matters to us is 23 million records sold [worldwide]. Success is the best revenge. Say what you want. Don't put us on the ballot for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. We still have one of the top 10-selling records of all time.

Does the lack of recognition from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame bother you?

RUCKER If we didn't get in, that's fine. But you really mean to tell us that we don't even deserve to be on the ballot?

When was the last time you listened to *Cracked Rear View* from start to finish?

RUCKER 1994. I'm not one to listen to records after I put them out. Ever. I don't really love to hear me sing, to be honest with you.

BRYAN When we played it in Mexico last April. We played it from start to finish.

In a shocking twist at the 1996 American Music Awards, Garth Brooks won favorite artist. He left the award on the podium, saying he didn't deserve it and said backstage that you did.

RUCKER That's one of the greatest, classiest things I've ever seen. When Garth did that, it just said so much to us about what we were doing for music. Every time I tell that story and he's around, he says, "You know where our award is, Darius? On the mantel!" (*Laughs.*)

The next month, you won Grammys for best new artist and best pop performance by a duo or group with vocals. What do you remember from that night?

RUCKER We figured they had to give us best new artist because we sold so many records. But the second one, we thought [TLC's] "Waterfalls" was going to win everything. KISS, in makeup for the first time since 1979, and Tupac [Shakur] walk out to present this category. We had just won best new artist and they rush us back to our seats. We're drunk. We sit down and then Tupac says, "My boys, Hootie & The Blowfish." That was unbelievable.

So "my boys" meant as much as the Grammy?

RUCKER Exactly! And KISS meant so much to all of us.

BRYAN I can't physically remember being on the stage with KISS and Tupac. It was so much bigger than me that I almost blocked it out. Isn't that crazy? It was so overwhelming that I didn't embrace the moment maybe the way I would have now.

Thirty years later, what do you think is the album's legacy?

BRYAN It seems to resonate in people's lives in a very big way. Those stories like [it's] their wedding song or they say, "It got me through my father's death," always keep coming back up to us, and it never gets old. What a great full-circle way as a songwriter to know that you've connected with people. As a songwriter and musician, you can't ask for more. It's such a dream come true to have made an album that has connected on such a level with people like that.

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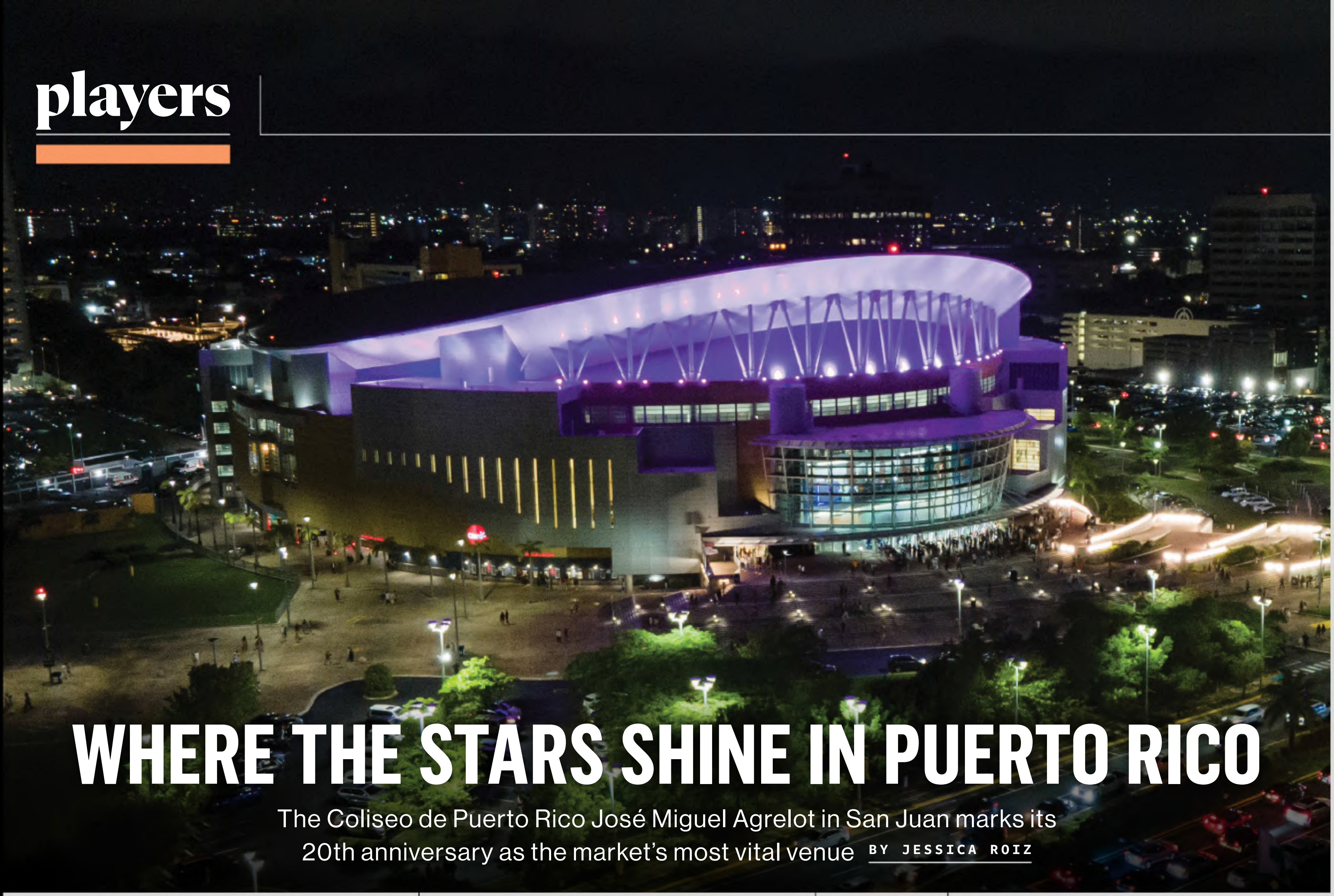

WHERE THE STARS SHINE IN PUERTO RICO

The Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot in San Juan marks its 20th anniversary as the market's most vital venue BY JESSICA ROIZ

ON SEPT. 13, 2004, Van Halen was the first major music act to perform at the newly inaugurated Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot in San Juan. That same year, local and international artists performed at the arena, including Draco Rosa, Daddy Yankee, Juan Luis Guerra, Andrea Bocelli and Korn.

"We wouldn't have been able to have those shows if we didn't have El Coliseo," says ASM Global regional GM Jorge Pérez, who manages the venue. "It was the need we had at that moment in history."

Mariela Vallines, executive director of the Puerto Rico Convention Center District Authority, which owns the building and contracts with ASM to operate it, notes that over the past 20 years, the coliseum "has become a cultural hub for the island, bringing people together to celebrate music and sports as the host of world-class events and entertainment. The venue has contributed significantly to Puerto Rico's economy, generating revenue for local businesses and providing employment opportunities on the island."

What's more, she adds, "it has helped to position Puerto Rico as a premium entertainment destination attracting both local and international audiences that have surpassed 10 million visitors over the last two decades."

Prior to El Coliseo's construction, the Caribbean island hosted sporting and entertainment events primarily at two locations: Coliseum Roberto Clemente Walker and Hiram Bithorn Stadium. Still, a high-end venue was needed "to be competitive in tourism" because "we couldn't only survive on leisure, travel and regular tourism," Pérez says.

Since its inception 20 years ago, "El Choli," as it is popularly called by locals, has become known both locally and internationally and the ultimate "dream arena" to perform at for many artists.

"The first goal of any artist, musician or DJ is to play in an arena that big," says Puerto Rican artist Jay Wheeler, who made his Choli debut in 2022 with four sold-out shows. "It's like winning a Grammy. Every artist from Puerto Rico will always have the goal of doing something in the coliseum."

A wave of urban acts has not only received a seal of approval at the venue but also achieved milestones. Daddy Yankee, with his 2019 Con Calma Pal' Choli shows, grossed $7 million, and Wisin y Yandel grossed $6.2 million with their 2018 string of concerts, according to Billboard Boxscore. The latter act holds the record for most sellouts, with 105,000 tickets sold across eight shows.

El Coliseo was No. 24 on *Billboard*'s 2023 year-end Top Venues global chart (in the 15,001-plus-capacity category), and it ranked fourth in the Latin/Spanish-language market venue after Miami's Kaseya Center, Madrid's WiZink Center and Movistar Arena in Santiago, Chile.

Pérez recently spoke with *Billboard* about the past, present and future of the venue.

What void did El Coliseo fill when it was built 20 years ago?

The government noticed that there was a need to have a world-class arena. The building we had before was Coliseo Roberto Clemente Walker, which opened in 1973 and where concerts and sporting events were held in the 1980s and 1990s. We also have the Hiram Bithorn Stadium built in 1962. With that came the construction of the Convention Center, which was inaugurated one year after El Coliseo. But the vision was that we needed world-class venues to be competitive in tourism.

We couldn't only survive on leisure, travel and regular tourism. We needed to provoke groups, meetings, conventions that would have economic movement. To complement that, the government really understood that we needed a top destination. So that's kind of the history behind it.

There was a lot of criticism at the beginning, even when construction started. But when we look back, it was a very smart decision, considering the exposure Puerto Rico has had in the entertainment industry and how it has opened doors for our artists. When we look back, it was a visionary idea with positive results.

What's the story behind the venue being named after comedian José Miguel Agrelot?

There were a lot of names and ideas out there. In January 2004, José Miguel Agrelot — who was a comedian, radio/TV host, actor, producer and visionary — passed away. So his name came to the top of the list and it was approved.

One of his most famous TV characters was Don Cholito, which he played during the "Encabulla y

"El Choli" is the nickname for the Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot (above), which is managed by ASM Global's Pérez (below).

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Vuelve y Tira" segment on *El Show del Medio Día* (*The Midday Show*) in the late '70s and early '80s. "Encabulla y Vuelve y Tira" referenced the stringing of a wooden spinning top [a yo-yo] — in other words, to do it again and keep trying. That became an analogy of persistence and optimism of the day-to-day challenges that Puerto Ricans had at the time.

While promoting "The Night of Revenge," one of the first boxing matches that took place at El Coliseo — where Miguel Cotto won the junior welterweight championship — sports commentator Elliott Castro was the first to say: "Let's go watch boxing at El Choliseo." Ever since, everyone knows the building by that nickname, El Choli.

Don Cholito provided optimism, a contagious smile and a vibrant personality — and that character was precisely about persistence and overcoming hard times. Those are some strong characteristics and traits that we have in Puerto Rico. Don Cholito's spirit lives in every corner of El Coliseo.

Why does the venue play an important role in the career of a Puerto Rican artist?
First, it's their hometown. We're considered "The Cathedral of Reggaetón," and for artists of that genre especially it's important to play at El Coliseo because it's like a big test for them. We've had the top *urbano* acts perform here. It's a key venue, and it [marks] a point in each artist's career of when they performed here, how well they did and how that impacts their careers moving forward.

Why has it become important for artists from other countries?
You have people [in Puerto Rico] who love and really appreciate live entertainment and can identify a good show. The energy here is amazing. We have an educated and knowledgeable crowd. When the crowd at El Coliseo accepts you as an artist, you know you're en route to doing good things. That goes back to our culture — how we're raised, how from a very small age we're listening to music — we know what a top production is. When an artist gets onstage and feels that energy and acceptance, it fills them with confidence in what they're doing and producing is special.

Do Puerto Rican acts get preference in dates?
Not really. We manage our calendar very responsibly, and it's on a first come, first served basis. I work directly with management or agencies or local promoters to try to find the best fit for dates.

What would you say has been the most logistically complicated concert?
It must be the World's Hottest Tour. Bad Bunny wanted to break the attendance record, and to do so, they put a very small stage on the south side and put all the production [overhead]. From one point of El Coliseo to the other, all the sound and lighting was on [the ceiling] — that's not normal. Usually, our stages are large, but they wanted to maximize the audience size. I hear that Bad Bunny's show now with the Most Wanted Tour is also very complex.

What economic impact does the venue have on the island?
The entertainment and event industry is huge in Puerto Rico and creates 30,000 jobs. It creates $2 billion, and almost $400 million of it goes to the government in the form of sales, tax and other revenue they receive from activities that we host in our buildings. It's a big chunk of the local economy.

We look at it as an important part of our economic ecosystem. We create a lot of entertainment tourism; people travel from different parts to see a show here. About 15% of tickets purchased at the venue come from a ZIP code not in Puerto Rico. Our vision is to keep promoting Puerto Rico as a premier entertainment and tourism destination. We have a social responsibility to help our community.

In terms of business opportunities that we can bring, the exposure Puerto Rico has gotten through El Coliseo and through the artists that act on our stage has helped put the country on the map. People are realizing that this is a top-notch venue.

How many people work an event at the venue?
On average at a sold-out event — from events staff to security to housekeeping to operation — we can have close to 400 to 500 staff, not considering the production staff on the artist's side. We have 26 corporate suites; we have our food concessions. At an end stage, which is the most common setup, we fit 15,000 people, and basically, that's the average staff that we must [have to] make sure everything moves smoothly.

Those who have graced the stage of the venue include (clockwise from top left) Ángela Aguilar, who performed at the 2023 Premios Juventud; Daddy Yankee; and Aventura.

El Coliseo is now also hosting televised awards shows.
The first one we hosted was the Billboard Latin Music Awards back in 2010, and we resumed in 2020 with Premios Tú Música Urbano. We've also hosted Univision's Premios Juventud in 2022 and 2023. Awards shows are very particular because they take up a lot of time. The setup for one of these shows can be seven to 10 days prior to the show. It's very complex production, and overall, it takes up a chunk of almost two to three weeks.

After the first awards show we hosted in 2010, looking and finding a three-week period that was not booked became a challenge for us. But when we started again, we realized it was a great showcase for the destination. Premios Juventud, for example, had great ratings and exposed us to an international audience.

What do you envision for El Coliseo 20 years from now?
We are already state of the art, but hopefully, we'll have a new and larger Coliseo. Even though we maintain the venue in optimal condition, we really focus on keeping this building [able] to comply with all the production riders and high-quality shows that we've had.

But the truth is, 20 more years is a long time — and I think that in that time frame, we should be transitioning to a new Coliseo. There has been conversations about building a new stadium in Puerto Rico, too, but I see us transitioning to stay relevant and continue producing results. This was designed as a sports arena, but looking into the future, I'm thinking of a new building with a larger capacity and that's more entertainment-related.

AGUILAR: GLADYS VEGA/GETTY IMAGES. DADDY YANKEE: ASTRIDA VALIGORSKY/GETTY IMAGES. AVENTURA: JOHN PARRA/GETTY IMAGES.

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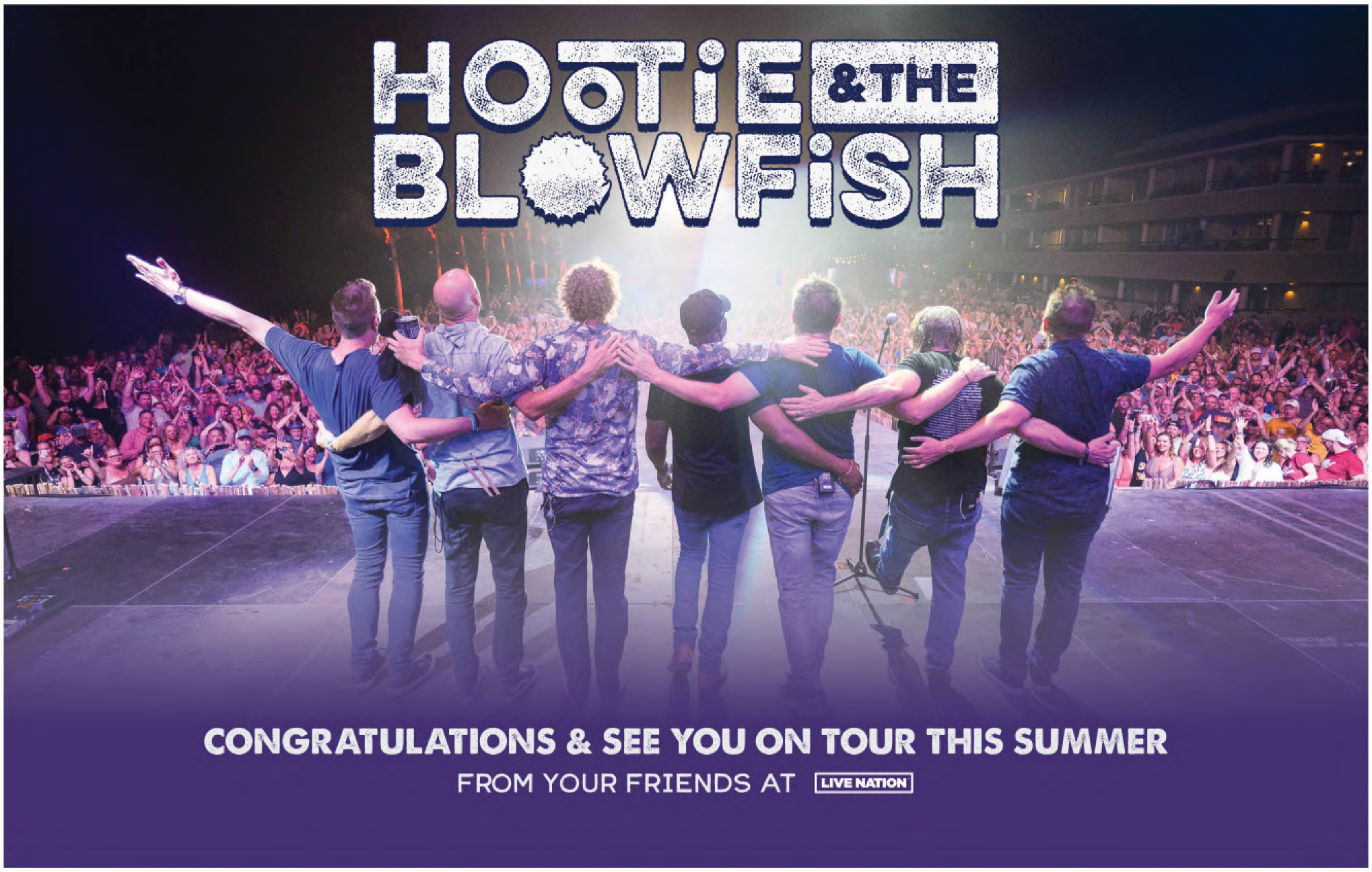
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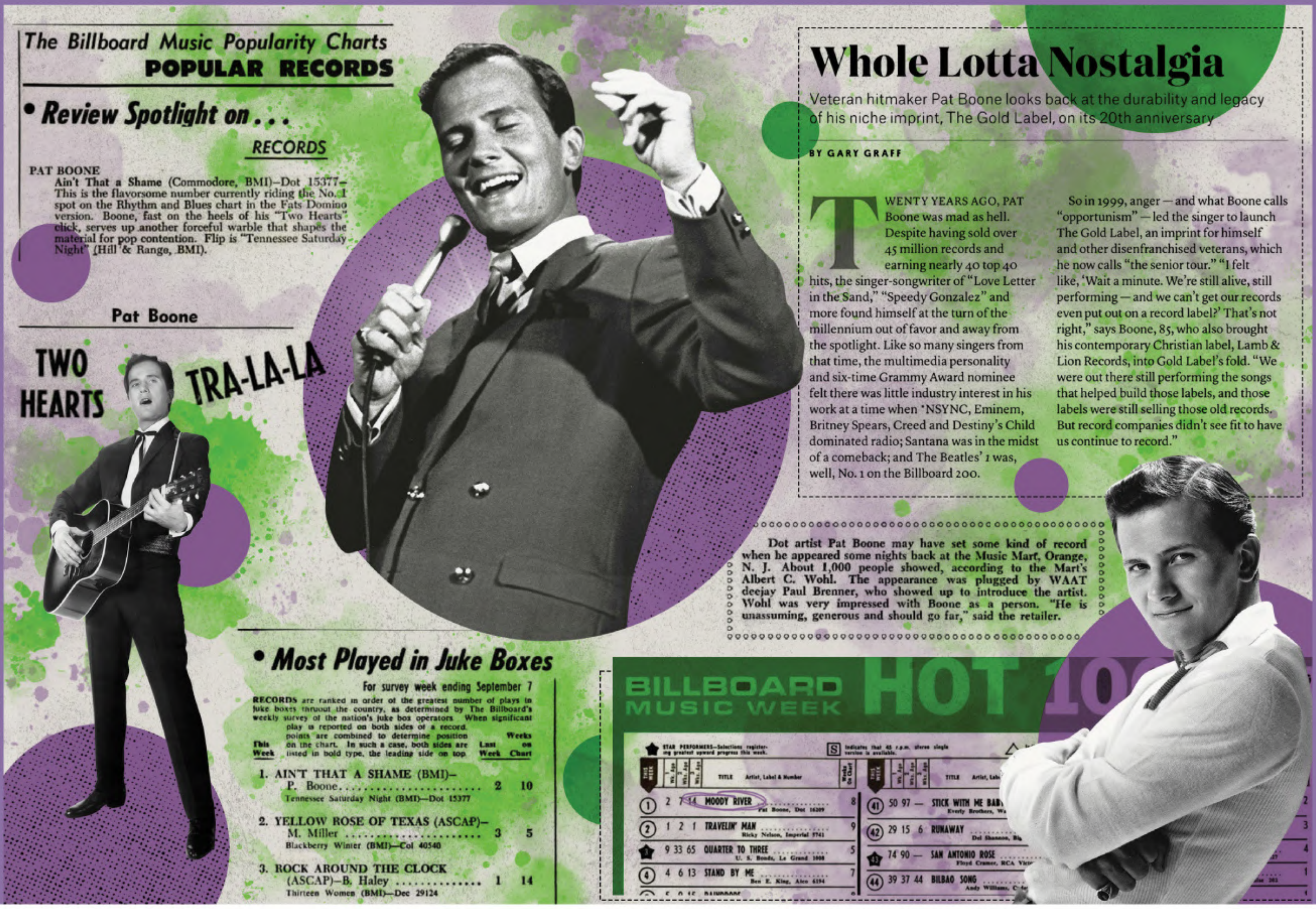

'SHAME' TO FAME: PAT BOONE AT 90

When Pat Boone turns 90 on June 1, it will be almost 70 years since he debuted on a *Billboard* chart. Back then, he was pushed as clean-cut counterprogramming to Elvis Presley — so successfully that he became bigger than the King, as measured by Billboard Hot 100 hits from the Aug. 4, 1958, debut of the chart through the end of the decade. From his first hits to his recent work with veteran artists, Pat has always been a boon to *Billboard*.

HE'S SO SQUARE, WE ALL CARE

"Pat Boone, Dot's new young find, comes off as a potential bobby sox grabber," noted the May 21, 1955, *Billboard* when "Two Hearts" hit No. 16 on the Most Played in Juke Boxes chart. After "Two Hearts," Boone didn't miss a beat: His cover of Fats Domino's "Ain't That a Shame" (hailed as a "flavorsome number" in the June 18, 1955, issue) became his first No. 1. "He is unassuming, generous and should go far," predicted a retailer in the Aug. 20, 1955, issue.

PAT, PENDING

The July 9, 1955, *Billboard* described Boone as a "fledgling performer, a pleasant-looking lad who'll do much better when he loosens up his platform manner." The "Love Letters in the Sand" singer may have taken note. A review of his Los Angeles concert in the June 19, 1961, issue hailed his "easy and relaxed patter." "Hope this one brings us another gold record," Boone said of "Moody River" at the show; in that same issue, it became his first No. 1 of the Hot 100 era.

JESUS CHRIST + SUPERSTAR

Boone's religious convictions eventually supplanted his pop aspirations. "Pat Boone is creating a 'Jesus Music' center," reported the June 3, 1972, *Billboard*, "for the myriad of small Jesus youth groups which record their own works but do not have the machinery for national distribution." Two years later, Boone got soul. When Motown planned a country imprint, he was its first artist, according to the Oct. 26, 1974, issue, which said "not only Boone but Boone's family will be represented." Three years later, daughter Debby Boone went solo on Arista, and her "You Light Up My Life" topped the Hot 100 for 10 weeks.

PAT SABBATH

Boone "blasted back on the *Billboard* album chart after a record 34-year, 2-month absence," reported the Feb. 15, 1997, issue, as his *In a Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy* hit the Billboard 200 at No. 125. Crediting his American Music Awards appearance with Alice Cooper as "one of the many publicity efforts" that fueled this success, *Billboard* said the album, released on Universal's Hip-O, was "about as far out in left field as you can go without hitting the wall."

GOLD IN YEARS

In 2019, Boone celebrated the 20th anniversary of The Gold Label, which he formed to help veteran hit-makers ignored by major labels. "We were out there still performing the songs that helped build those labels, and those labels were still selling those old records," Boone said in the July 27, 2019, issue, but those acts found it harder to get new label deals. "It's a real labor of love, just like everything else I do with music."

—JOE LYNCH

ILLUSTRATION BY BARBARA GIBSON

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